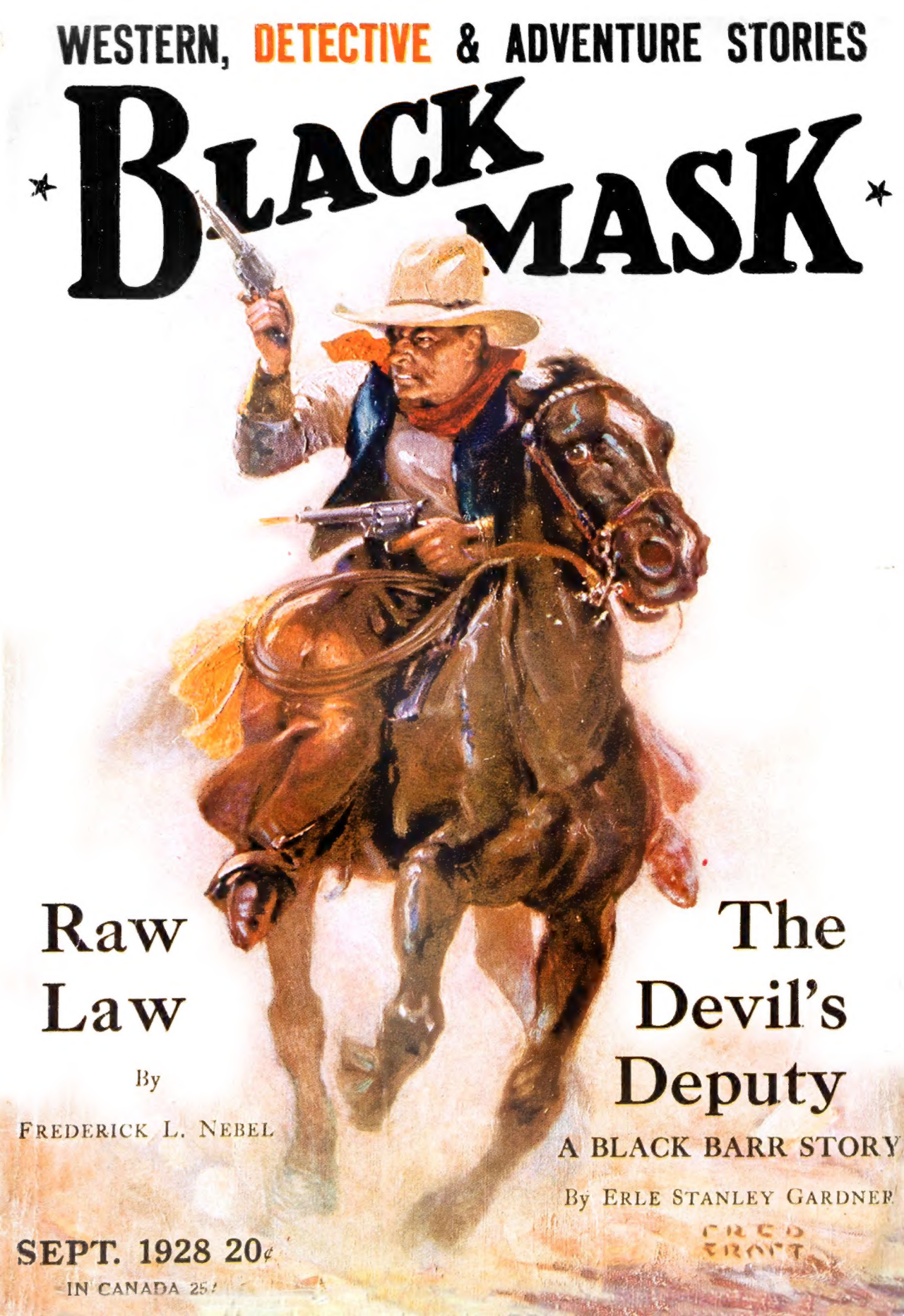
WESTERN, DETECTIVE & ADVENTURE STORIES

BLACK MASK



Raw Law

By

FREDERICK L. NEBEL

The Devil's Deputy

A BLACK BARR STORY

By ERLE STANLEY GARDNER

SEPT. 1928 20¢

IN CANADA 25¢

"After every meal"

Rest, relaxation, recreation,
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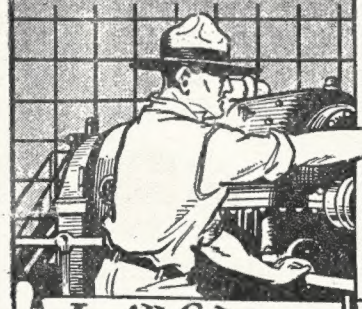
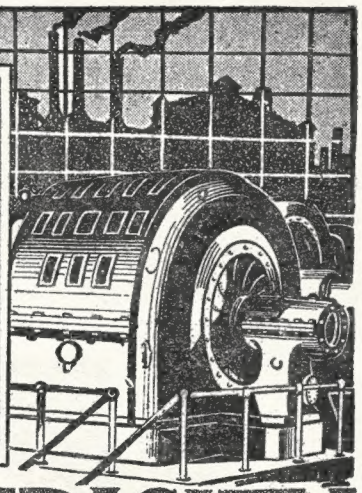
Just the touch of refreshment and lasting good taste that makes any outing perfect.

Thousands of "Cooke" Trained Men Earn



$3500 to $10,000 a year in ELECTRICITY



I will help you too, into a big pay job L. L. Cooke

the BIG PAY FIELD

LOOK WHAT I'VE DONE FOR THESE TWO MEN

$75 A WEEK!

"Dear Mr. Cooke: I was working in a store for $18 a week when I started your Course. Then I began doing Electrical Work in my spare time. Now I average as much as $75 a week."

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"Dear Chief: If it hadn't been for your wonderful Course I wouldn't now be making as high as $65 a day. It makes me proud to have your Diploma. And believe me I am a booster for your Course."

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L. L. COOKE — the man who has trained and helped thousands of men.

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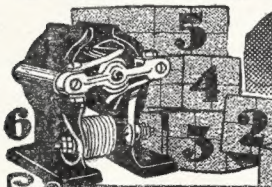
Chief Instruction Engineer
L. L. COOKE SCHOOL OF ELECTRICITY
Dept. 146
2150 Lawrence Ave.
Chicago, Ill.

Free of EXTRA COST

6 BIG OUTFITS



FREE BOOK COUPON *MAIL IT!*

L. L. COOKE, Chief Instruction Engineer
Dept. 146, 2150 Lawrence Ave., Chicago, Ill.

You may send me, entirely Free and fully prepaid, your book, "Secrets of Success in Electricity," together with facts about your Home Study Course in Electricity.

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City_____

Residents of Canada may send this coupon to R. A. Farrow, Special Representative, 7 Medbury Lane, East, Windsor, Ontario, Canada.

The "Cooke" Trained Man is the "Big Pay" Man

BLACK MASK

A MAGAZINE OF DETECTIVE, ADVENTURE, AND WESTERN STORIES
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JOSEPH T. SHAW, Editor

VOL. XI. No. 7 SEPTEMBER, 1928

Contents

THE CRIMES OF RICHMOND CITY—RAW LAW—A complete novelette . . Frederick L. Nebel . . . 9
A story of modern crime conditions, as realistic as the pages of the daily press.

RED WINGS—A complete novelette . . . . Raoul F. Whitfield . . . 32
A grim duel between a bandit leader and a Federal operative on the Border.

THE DEVIL'S DEPUTY—A complete novelette Erle Stanley Gardner . . 43
A story of Black Barr when Law and Justice speak through his six-guns.

AN HOUR BEFORE DAWN . . . . . Earl W. and Marion Scott 71
An Underworld fighter is not satisfied with a clean getaway but first tries vengeance.

THE WOOING OF SHAH-LAYAH . . . Henry Wallace Phillips 78
It happened out in the clear sunshine, in the clean air, and they put it up to the Boss.

A MOLL AND HER MAN . . . . . Erika Zastrow 84
How a girl of the Underworld played the game of loyalty.

WHAT THE NEXT MONTH WILL BRING 90

THE LAST CHANCE . . . . . Carroll John Daly . . . 91
Race Williams gets his last chance at a fortune and the secret of The Hidden Hand.

THE KID WRANGLER . . . . . Francis W. Hilton . . . 115
The bully made a mistake when he picked on this Kid.

CROOKS IN ARCADY . . . . . Tom Curry 122
Mac takes a vacation and tries to forget all about crooks—but they won't let him.

Cover painting by Fred Craft Headings by Arthur Rodman Bowker

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A. W. SUTTON, President P. C. CODY, Vice-President and Circulation Director J. H. KAMNA, Secretary and Treasurer
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"I TELL you, Tom, it was a lucky day for both of us when you sent in that I. C. S. coupon. You'd never be where you are today if you hadn't decided to study in spare time just when you did."

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City.....State.....

Occupation.....

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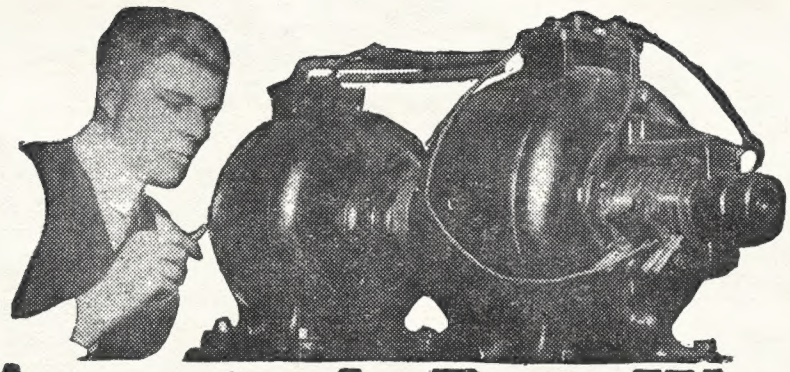
THAT IS BLACK MASK

Twenty cents the package, at any corner newsstand, or direct from the publishers at a reduced price by the year.



Amazingly Easy Way to get into ELECTRICITY

Don't spend your life waiting for $5 raises in a dull, hopeless job. Now . . . and . . . forever . . . say good-bye to 25 and 35 dollars a week. Let me teach you how to prepare for positions that lead to $50, $60 and up a week in Electricity—NOT by correspondence, but by an amazing way to teach that makes you a practical electrician in 90 days! Getting into electricity is far easier than you imagine!

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Not a Correspondence School

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Inventor . . . Unlimited
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Don't worry about a job. Coyne training settles the job question for life. Big demand for Coyne trained men. Our employment department gives you lifetime service. Two weeks after graduation, Clyde F. Hart got a position as electrician with the Great Western Railroad at over $100 a week. That's not unusual. We can point to many Coyne men making up to $600 a month. $60 a week is only the beginning of your opportunity. You can go into radio, battery or automotive electrical business for yourself and make $3000 a year and up.

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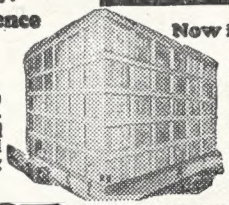
Get this FREE Book



Now in Our New Home

This is our new fireproof, modern home wherein is installed thousands of dollars worth of the newest and most modern Electrical equipment of all kinds. We now have a larger amount of floor space devoted to the exclusive teaching of practical electricity. Every comfort and convenience has been arranged to make you happy and contented during your training.

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COYNE ELECTRICAL SCHOOL, Dept. 68-66
500 S. Paulina St., Chicago, Ill.

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Without obligations send me your big free catalog and all details of Free Employment service, Radio and Automotive Courses without extra cost, and how many "earn while learning." I understand I will not be bothered by any salesman.

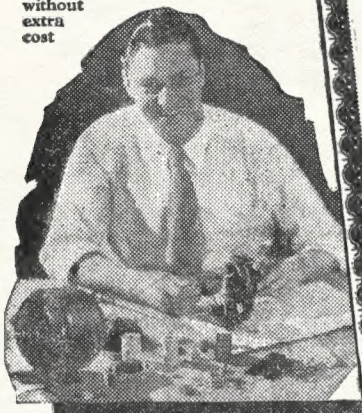
Name.....

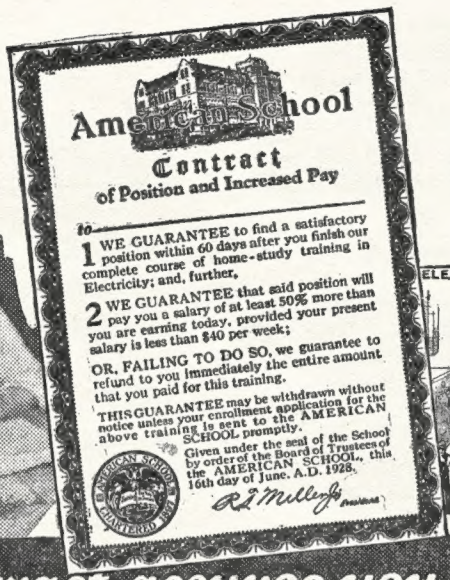
Address.....

City.....State.....

This $10 Motor

One of the 8 outfits of standard tools and materials supplied without extra cost





American School

Contract

of Position and Increased Pay

To——

1 WE GUARANTEE to find a satisfactory position within 60 days after you finish our complete course of home-study training in Electricity; and, further,

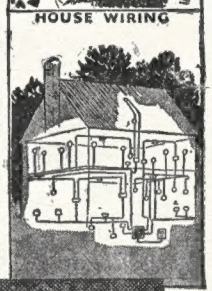
2 WE GUARANTEE that said position will pay you a salary of at least 50% more than you are earning today, provided your present salary is less than $40 per week;

OR, FAILING TO DO SO, we guarantee to refund to you immediately the entire amount that you paid for this training.

THIS GUARANTEE may be withdrawn without notice unless your enrollment application for the above training is sent to the AMERICAN SCHOOL promptly.

Given under the seal of the School by order of the Board of Trustees of the AMERICAN SCHOOL, this 16th day of June, A.D. 1928.

R. J. Mullen Jr. President



This Contract assures you an Electrical JOB and 50% Raise

WE ARE looking for more ambitious men to place in well-paid Electrical positions. To qualify, you must have at least a grammar school education, you must be genuinely interested in Electricity and willing to devote a part of your spare time to getting ready. A two-million-dollar institution offers you this chance of a life-time to get into Electricity, the world's livest industry—*without risk* (as explained in our guarantee above).

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Instead of saying "learn Electricity and *prepare* for a good position"—we say LEARN ELECTRICITY AND WE'LL GET YOU A GOOD POSITION. *At a cost and on easy terms you can afford*, without risk of a penny, you can get a remarkable training built by 29 noted Electrical Engineers from America's greatest Corporations and Universities. Training simplified so you can understand and do it, at home, in spare time. A new, improved kind of preparation for a good job, which you learn by doing actual Electrical work with 8 outfits of standard tools and materials (supplied by us without extra charge).

There is no reason why YOU can't have a well-paid Electrical position. We can and will see that you get one. Mail the coupon and we'll send facts about the opportunities in Electricity that will astonish you, together with my sensational offer to prepare you, get you a job and raise your pay, or no cost!

Training built by CHIEF ENGINEER DUNLAP and 29 Noted Engineers from Westinghouse General Electric Western Electric Mass. Institute Cutler-Hammer Columbia Univ. Commonwealth Edison Am. Tel. & Tel. Armour Institute and other great Universities and Corporations

The American School

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JOBS $40 to $100 a Week!

Transportation, manufacturing, our homes, our work, our autos and airplanes are all electrified. 78% of the machinery of the U. S. is operated by electric power. More than half our homes, offices and farms are lighted by Electricity. Radio is Electricity, and so are telephone, telegraph, cable, elevators, street cars, refrigeration. It would take a big book just to mention the many uses and industries of Electricity. That's the kind of business to get into. Solid as the nation itself. Prosperous and busy whether times are good or bad.

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Electrical Division
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Name.....

Address.....

Age.....*Occupation*.....

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Railway Postal Clerks, like all Government employees, are given a yearly vacation of 15 working days (about 18 days). On runs they usually work three days and have three days off duty or in the same proportion. During this off duty and vacation, their pay continues just as though they were working. When they grow old, they are retired with a pension. As Railway Postal Clerks are continually traveling, they have an excellent chance to see the country.

CITY MAIL CARRIERS—POST OFFICE CLERKS

Clerks and Carriers commence at $1700 a year and automatically increase $100 a year to $2100 with further increase to $2300. They also have 15 days vacation. City residence is unnecessary.

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(Open to men or women 18 or over)

Salary $1140 to $1860 a year. Pleasant clerical work in the various departments and offices at Washington, D. C., and throughout the country.

WHAT WILL YOU EARN FIVE YEARS FROM NOW?

Compare these conditions with your present or your prospective condition, perhaps changing positions frequently, kicking around from post to pillar, no chance in sight for PERMANENT employment; frequently out of a position and the year's average salary very low. DO YOU EARN $1900 EVERY YEAR? HAVE YOU ANY ASSURANCE THAT A FEW YEARS FROM NOW YOU WILL GET $2700 OR MORE A YEAR, EVERY YEAR?

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Fill out the coupon. Tear it off and mail it today—now, at once. DO IT NOW—This investment of two cents for a postage stamp may result in your getting a U. S. Government Job.

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Dept. F-272
ROCHESTER, N. Y.

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Post Office Clerk.....	($1700-$2300)
City Mail Carrier.....	($1700-$2100)
Rural Mail Carrier.....	($2100-$3300)
General Clerk.....	($1140-$1860)
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Name .....

Address .....

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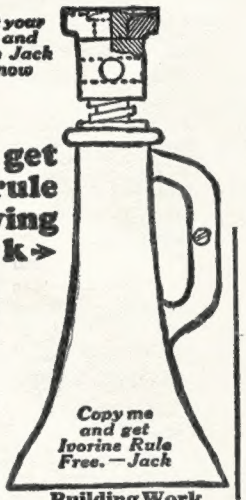
This Genuine Ivorine Pocket Rule

Get out your pencil and copy the Jack right now

←You get this rule for copying this Jack→



Copy me and get Ivorine Rule Free.—Jack

Can you copy it? Try it. How you copy it may give me some idea of what kind of a draftsman you would be. If you are 16 years old or older and will mail me your sketch at once, I will send you, free, and prepaid, a draftsman's Ivorine Pocket rule, shown here.

This will go to you entirely with my compliments.

In addition I will send you my book on Successful Draftsmanship. Don't wait. Copy the sketch now and mail it to me.

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The automobile industry is one of the greatest in America. Thousands of draftsmen needed. I'll train you for the work.

Electricity
Electricity is the coming motive force of the world. Draftsmen are needed in every department of this fascinating work. I'll train you at home. Get a job here.

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Aviation is just in its infancy. It is bound to expand to enormous proportions. Draftsmen are essential to it. I'll train you quick at home for drafting position.

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Motor bus building and motor bus transportation have become leading world industries. Hundreds of draftsmen engaged in this work. I'll show you the way.

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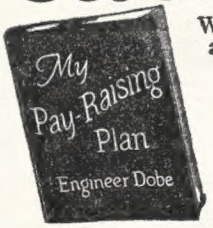
There will always be building. No structure can be erected without plans drawn by draftsmen. I'll make you an architectural draftsman at home.

Get My Free Pay-Raising Plan



Write to me. I will send you this new book. Not a catalog. My Pay Raising Plan and Money Making Advice. I can prove that John Savadge, trained by me, makes $300 a month. Earl J. Dupree, trained by me, refused $600 a month because he makes more in his own business. A. H. Bernier, trained by me, earns $7000 to $9000 a year. Arthur Dewalt, trained by me, makes more than $400 a month. D. C. Stroop, trained by me, makes $475 a month. L. V. Broughten, trained by me, makes $300 a month.

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After training you I help you to get a job without charging you a cent for this service. Employers of draftsmen come to me for men because they know that men I train make good.

I Train You at Home, New, Quick, Sure Way

My practical working method makes every step in learning drafting, as clear as a moving picture. That's why I train you so fast to be a draftsman.

You get these tools as my student

You GET THESE FINE QUALITY, GENUINE, IMPORTED DRAFTSMAN'S TOOLS, just as soon as you become my student. No finer tools can be made for practical drafting work.

Money Back if Not Satisfied

What could be fairer than that? I don't ask you to take any chances. I train you under a positive Money Back Agreement. If my training does not satisfy you after you have finished you get every penny back.

Earn While You Learn

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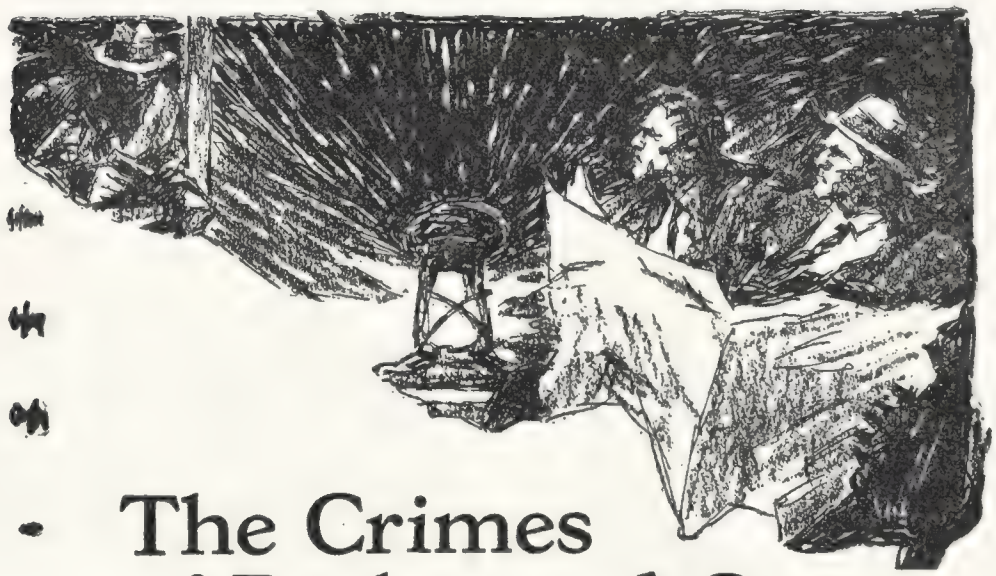


The Crimes of Richmond City

By FREDERICK L. NEBEL

RAW LAW

A city of graft and crime; a man's buddy, a victim; then the deadly game of vengeance—and justice.

CAPTAIN STEVE MacBRIDE was a tall square-shouldered man of forty more or less hard-bitten years. He had a long, rough-chiseled face, steady eyes, a beak of a nose, and a wide, firm mouth that years of fighting his own and others' wills had hardened. His face shone ruddily, cleanly, as if it were used to frequent and vigorous contact with soap and water. For eighteen years he had been connected, in one capacity or another, with Richmond City's police department, and Richmond City today is a somewhat hectic community of almost a hundred-thousand population.

MacBride sat in his office at Police Headquarters. He sat at his shining oak desk, in a swivel chair, smoking a blackened briar pipe, with the latest

copy of the Richmond City *Free Press* spread before him. In one corner a steam radiator clanked and hissed intermittently. There were a half dozen chairs lined against the wall behind him. The floor was of cement, the ceiling was high and, like the walls, a light, impersonal tan. About the room there was something hollow and clean and efficient. About the borders of the two windows at MacBride's left there were irregular frames of snow left by a recent blizzard. But the room was warm and, except for the clanking of the radiator, quite silent.

Reading on, MacBride sometimes moved in his chair or took his pipe from his mouth to purse his lips, it seemed a little grimly and ironically. Once he muttered something behind clenched teeth, way down in the cavern of his throat. Presently he let the paper drop and sat back, drawing silently on his pipe and letting his eyes wander back and forth over the collection of photographs tacked on the bulletin board on the wall before him—photographs of men wanted for robbery, murder, and homicide. One of the telephones on his desk rang. He took off the receiver, listened, said, "Send him in." Then he leaned back again and swung his chair to face the door.

It opened presently, and a man neatly dressed in a blue overcoat and a gray fedora strolled in. A cigarette was drooping from one corner of his mouth. He had a young-old face, a vague smile, and the whimsical eyes of the wicked and wise.

"Hello, cap." He kicked the door shut with his heel and leaned against it, indolently, as if he were a little weary —not in his bones, but with life.

"Hello, Kennedy," nodded MacBride. "Sit down."

"Thanks."

Kennedy dropped into a chair, unbuttoned his overcoat, but did not remove it.

MacBride creaked in his chair, looked at the newspaper on his desk and said, with a brittle chuckle, "Thanks for the editorial."

"Don't thank me, Mac."

"Your sheet's trying to ride us, eh?"

"Our business is to ride everybody we can."

"M-m-m. I know."

Kennedy knocked the ash from his cigarette. "Of course, it's tough on you." He smiled, shrugged. "I know your hands are tied."

"Eh?" MacBride's eyes steadied.

"You heard me, Mac. This little boy knows a lot. Y' know, *you* don't run the Department."

MacBride's lips tightened over his pipe.

"*You,*" went on Kennedy, "would like to put the clamps on this dirty greaseball, Cavallo. Now wouldn't you?"

MacBride's eyes narrowed, and he took his pipe from his mouth. "Would I?" His hand knotted over the hot bowl of the pipe.

"Sure you would. But—" Kennedy shrugged—"you can't."

"Listen, Kennedy. What did you come here for, to razz me?"

"I don't know why I came here. It was cold out, and I know you keep it warm here. And—well, I just thought I'd drop in for a chat."

"You thought you'd get some inside dope. Go ahead, come out with it. Well, Kennedy, I've got nothing to say. News is as tight here as a drumhead. What a bunch of wise-cracking eggs you've got down in your dump. Gink Cavallo'll laugh himself into a bellyache when he reads it. The lousy bum!"

"Something's got to break, Mac. When a bootlegging greaseball starts to run a town, starts to run the Department, something's got to break."

"He's not running *me!*" barked MacBride.

"The hell he isn't! Don't tell me. I'm no greenhorn, Mac. Maybe not you personally. But your hands are tied. He's running somebody else, and some-

body else is running somebody else, and the last somebody else is running you."

"You're talking through your hat, Kennedy."

"Oh, am I? No, I can't lay my hands on it all, but I can use my head. I know a few things. I know that Gink Cavallo is one of the wisest wops that ever packed a rod. He's a brother-in-law to Tony Diorio, and Diorio is president of the Hard Club, and the Hard Club swings two thousand sure votes and a thousand possible votes. And, you know, Mac, that these wops stick together. Most of the bohunks in the mills are wops, and they've sworn by the Hard Club, and—get this, Mac—it was the Hard Club that put Pozzo in for alderman and Mulroy for state's attorney. And it's the state's attorney's office that's running the Department—the rottenest administration in the history of Richmond City. It's just putting two and two together.

"You can't move, Mac. You've got your orders—hands off. What can you do? You're a captain. You've been with the Department for eighteen years. You've got a wife and a kid, and if you were kicked out of the Department you'd be on the rocks. I know you hate Cavallo like poison, and I know you're just aching to take a crack at him. It sure is a tough break for you, Mac."

MacBride had not batted an eye-lash, had not shone by the slightest flicker of eyes or expression, how he took Kennedy's speech. He drew on his pipe meditatively, looking down along his beak of a nose. It was in the heart of MacBride that seas of anger were crashing and tumbling. Because Kennedy was right; he had hit the nail on the head with every charge. But MacBride was not the man to whimper or to go back on the Department. Loyalty had been ground into him long years ago—loyalty to his badge.

His voice was casual, "Finished, Kennedy? Then run along. I'm busy."

"I know, Mac. Kind of touched you on the quick, eh? It's all right, old-timer. Your jaw's sealed, too. You'd be one hell of a fool to tell Steve Kennedy how right he is. Well." Kennedy got up and lit a fresh butt. "It's all right by me, Cap. But when the big noise breaks, don't forget yours truly. It can't go on, Mac. Somebody'll slip. Some guy'll yap for more than his share. I've seen these rotten conditions before—'Frisco, Chicago, New Orleans. I'm hard-boiled as hell, Mac, and there's no one pulling any wool over my eyes. I'm just standing by and laughing up my sleeve." He took a pull on his cigarette. "There's one wild Mick in your outfit who's very liable to spill the beans, get himself shoved out to the sticks and maybe poked in the ribs with a bullet, besides."

"You mean—?"

"Sure. Jack Cardigan. S' long, Mac."

"Good bye, Kennedy."

When the door closed, MacBride let go of himself. He heaved to his feet, spread-legged, his fists clenched, his eyes narrowed and burning intensely.

"God, Kennedy, if you only *knew* how right you are!" he muttered. "If I was only single—if I hadn't Anna and Judith. I'm tied all around, dammit! Home—and *here!*" He sank back into his chair, his head drooping, age creeping upon him visibly.

II

HE was sitting there, in precisely the same position, fifteen minutes later. And fifteen minutes later the door swung open swiftly, silently, and Jack Cardigan came in. A tall, lean, dark-eyed man, this Cardigan, rounding thirty years. Men said he was reckless, case-hardened, and a flash with the gun. He was.

"You look down at the mouth, Steve," he said, offhand.

"I am, Jack. Kennedy—"

"Oh, that guy!"

"Kennedy dropped in to pay me a call. Sharp, that bird. Pulls ideas out

of the air, and every idea hits you like a sock on the jaw."

"Been razzing you?"

"Has he! Jack, he's got the whole thing worked out to a T. He'd just need my O. K. to spill the whole beans to the public, and likely Police Headquarters 'd be mobbed. He's right. He's got the right slant on the whole dirty business. Jack, if I was ten years younger, I'd tell the Big Boss to go to hell and take my chances. That lousy wop is sitting on top of the world, and his gang's got Richmond City tied by the heels."

Cardigan sat down on the edge of a chair. There was something on his mind. You could see that much. He tapped with his fingers on the desk, his lips were a little set, the muscle lumps at either side of his jaw quivered, his dark eyes were close-lidded, active, flashing back and forth across MacBride's face.

"Brace up, Steve," he clipped. "I've got some news that might knock you for a row of pins."

"Eh?" MacBride straightened in his chair.

Cardigan's lips curled. "I came up alone. The sergeant said Kennedy'd gone up to see you. Didn't notice if he'd left. So I came up beforehand—to see."

"Kennedy left fifteen minutes ago. What's up?"

"Enough!" Cardigan took a vicious crack at the desk with his doubled fist. "The dirty pups got Hanley!"

"What!" MacBride's chair creaked violently. He leaned forward, laid his hand on Cardigan's knee, his breath sucked in and held.

"Two shots—through the lung and the heart! Somebody's going to pay for this, Steve! Joe Hanley was my partner—my sister's husband! There's nobody'll stop me—nobody! I'll—"

"Just a minute, Jack," cut in MacBride gently "How 'd it happen?"

Cardigan got a grip on his temper, bit his lip. "I was out at Joe's place for dinner tonight, on Webster Road. Marion was a little upset. Kid had a bad cold, and she had a streak of worrying on, just like her. I mind five years ago, how she used to say she'd never marry a cop. She used to worry about me all the time. Not that a cop wasn't good enough—hell, no. But she used to say if she married a cop she'd be laying awake all night worrying. So, like a woman, she married Joe, and Joe's been a buddy of mine since we were kids. Well, you know that. Then she had two to worry over—Joe and me.

"And she was worrying tonight. Joe laughed. So did I. She got me alone in the hall and told me to watch out for Joe She'd always been doing this. I kidded her. She said she meant it, and that she felt something was going to happen. I remember how she hung on to him when we breezed. God!"

"Steady, Jack!"

"I know. Well, Joe and I hoofed it to the park, to get a bus into the city. There was none in sight, so we began hiking down Webster Road till one 'd come. Pretty lonesome there. A car came weaving down behind us, and we heard a girl scream. We turned around and held up our hands for it to stop. The driver swerved to one side, intending to duck us. He slid into a ditch, roared his motor trying to get out. The girl was yelling hysterically. We saw her pitch out of the car. Then it heaved out of the ditch and was getting under way when Joe hopped it, pulling his rod. Two shots slammed out, and Joe keeled. I had my hands full with the girl. The car skidded and crashed into the bushes.

"I had my rod out then and ran up. Two guys in the back had jumped out and ducked into the bushes. I nailed the chauffeur. He wasn't heeled, but he was trying to get away, too. He started giving me a line and I socked him on the head so he'd stay put till I looked after Joe. Well, there wasn't much to look after. Joe was dead. The girl—she was only a flapper—was bawling and shaking in the knees. She'd been pretty well mauled. A machine came along and I stopped it."

"Wait. You say you got the chauffeur?"

"Sure. He says his name's Clark, and he's downstairs barking for a lawyer."

"Who's the girl?"

"Pearl Carr's her name. Just a wise little flapper who thought she was smart by taking a ride. She was waiting for a bus—she told me this—when this big touring car stopped and one of the guys offered her a lift. Sure, she got in, the little fool, and these guys started playing around."

"Know the guys?"

Cardigan growled. "Two of Cavallo's guns or I don't know anything. Her description of one tallies with Bert Geer, that walking fashion-plate. You remember two years ago they nabbed Geer on suspicion for that girl out in St. Louis they found strangled near Grand Gardens. But he got out of it. The other guy sounds like that rat "Monkey" Burns. I took the number of the touring car. I looked up the records downstairs and found the plates had been stolen from a sedan two weeks ago. If they're Geer and Burns, it means that Cavallo's in the pot, too, because they're the wop's right-hand guns. If we make them take the rap, they'll draw in Cavallo, and just as sure as you're born Diorio and Pozzo and our estimable State's Attorney Mulroy'll get in the tangle, and there'll be hell to pay all around. But I'm going through with this, Steve, and the state's attorney's office be damned! Joe was my buddy, closer to me than a brother—my sister's husband! God—can you picture Marion!"

MacBride was tight-lipped, a little pale, terribly grim. The ultimate had come. Would they tie the Department's hands now?

"Did you let Clark get a lawyer?" he asked.

"No—cripes, no!"

"Then get him up here. Where's the girl?"

"Downstairs, still bawling. I sent a cop out to get her a dress or something. I phoned her old man and he's driving in to get her."

"All right. Leave her there. But get Clark."

Cardigan went out and MacBride settled back, heaved a vast sigh, crammed fresh tobacco into his pipe. When, a few moments later, the door opened, he was puffing serenely, though deep in his heart there was a great numbness.

Clark came in, aided by a shove in the rear from Cardigan. The detective closed the door, grabbed Clark by the shoulder and slammed him not too gently into a chair.

"Say, go easy there, guy!" whined Clark, a charred clinker of a runt, with a face of seeming innocence, like a mongrel dog.

"Close your jaw!" snapped Cardigan.

Clark spread his hands toward MacBride. "Tell this guy to leave me alone, Captain. He's been treatin' me hard. First off he beans me with his gat and since then he's been chuckin' me around like I was a rag. I got my rights. I'm a citizen. You can't go cloutin' citizens. I got my—"

"Soft pedal," said MacBride heavily. "So your name's Clark, eh? How'd you come to be driving that car?"

"I was drivin' it, that's all. I'm all right. I don't know nothin'. I was just drivin' it. You can't make a slop-rag outta me."

"Shut up," cut in MacBride.

"All right, I'll shut up. That's what I'm gonna do. You gotta let me get a lawyer. I got rights. Them's a citizen's rights."

"Listen to the bum!" chuckled Cardigan.

"There, see!" chirped Clark. "He's still insultin' me. He's just a big wise guy, he is. I got my rights. I'll see you get yours, fella. I was drivin' a car. All right, I was drivin' it. I know you guys. I ain't gotta talk."

"You're going to talk, Clark," said MacBride ominously. "And none of

this cheap chatter, either. Talk that counts—see?"

"I ain't. No, I ain't. I want a lawyer. Gimme that phone."

He scrambled out of the chair, clawed for the telephone. Cardigan grabbed him by the nape of the neck, hurled him back so hard that Clark hit the chair aslant and, knocking it over, sprawled with it to the floor. He crouched, cringing, blubbering.

"You leave me alone, you! What the hell you think you're doin'? You leave me—"

"Get up—get up," gritted Cardigan. "That's only a smell compared with what's coming if you don't come clean. Get up, you dirty little rat!" He reached down, caught Clark, heaved him up and banged him down into another chair.

Clark's teeth chattered. His hands fidgeted, one with the other. His mouth worked, gasping for breath. His eyes almost popped from his head.

"Now," came MacBride's low voice, "who were the two guys that got away?"

"You can't make me talk now. You can't!" Clark gripped the sides of his chair, the stringy cords on his neck bulged. "I ain't talkin'—not me. I want a lawyer—that's what. Them's my rights, gettin' a lawyer. There!" He stuck out his chin defiantly.

MacBride turned in his chair and looked at Cardigan. Cardigan nodded, his fingers opening and closing.

"Take him into the sweat room, Jack," said MacBride. "Sweat him."

Clark stiffened in his chair, and sucked in his nether lip with a sharp intake of breath. He writhed.

"You can't do that, you can't!" he screamed. "I got my rights. You can't beat up a citizen."

"Citizen are you?" chuckled Cardigan. "You're a bum, Clark. You were driving a car with somebody else's plates. You tried to get away with the other two birds but you weren't fast enough. My buddy was killed, see? Now you'll talk. I'll sweat it out of you, Clark, so help me!"

"You won't! I ain't gonna talk. Gawd almighty, I want a lawyer! You can't stop me from gettin' one!'

"You're stopped, Clark," bit off Cardigan. "Get up and come on along with me."

Cardigan reached for him. Clark squirmed in his chair, lashed out with his feet. One foot caught Cardigan in the stomach and he doubled momentarily, grimacing but silent. MacBride was out of his seat in a flash, and Clark was jerked to his feet so fast that he lost his breath. He was wild-eyed, straining at the arms that held him, his lips quivering, groans and grunts issuing from his throat.

"You ain't gonna beat me—you ain't! You'll see! I won't talk! I got my rights. I—I—"

"I'll take him, Steve," said Cardigan.

MacBride stepped back and Clark struggled frantically in Cardigan's grasp as the latter worked him toward the door.

The telephone bell jangled.

"Wait," said MacBride.

Cardigan paused at the door.

MacBride picked up the phone, muttered something, listened. Then, "What's that?" His hands knotted around the instrument, his eyes narrowed, his mouth hardened. "Are you sure of that?" He groaned deep in his throat, rocked on his feet. Then, bitterly, "All right!"

He slammed the receiver into the hook and banged the instrument down upon the desk violently. He turned to face Cardigan.

"It's no use, Jack. A runner for that lousy firm of Cohen, Fraser and Cohen, is downstairs, which means this bum slides out of our hands."

Cardigan's face darkened. "How'd they know we had this bird so soon?"

"That's their business. They work on a big retainer from the head of the gang Clark belongs to."

There was a knock at the door, and a sergeant and a patrolman came in. The sergeant showed MacBride a writ,

and the patrolman marched Clark out of the office. Then the sergeant left, and MacBride and Cardigan were alone.

"Wires being pulled again," muttered Cardigan. "This guy will never come to trial."

"Of course not," nodded MacBride grimly.

"What a fine state of affairs! We nab a guy, and have every chance to make him come across, and then he's taken out of our hands. What's the use of a Police Department, anyhow?"

"Clark is one of Cavallo's boys. No doubt about it. And we can't do a thing—just sit and curse the whole thing. It's tough to be on the Force eighteen years—and have to stand for it."

"I know, Steve, you can't move. Your wife and kid to think of. But there's one way to get back at these wops, and the only way. They killed Joe, and they've got to pay for it! I'm going to make 'em pay—pound for pound! By God, I am, and the Department and the State's Attorney and everybody else be damned!"

"Jack, you can't—alone. You're a dick and—"

"I'm no longer a dick. I'm single and free and my resignation goes in now! I'm going to fight Cavallo, Steve, at his own game!"

"What do you mean?"

"Just what I said. I'm resigning from the Department. I'm going on my own and wipe out Cavallo and every one of his dirty gunmen! Richmond City is going to see one of the biggest gang wars in its history! When they killed Joe Hanley, they killed the wrong man, for my part! I'm going to fall on 'em like a ton of brick!"

"Jack, you can't do it!"

"Watch me!" chuckled Cardigan, his eyes glittering.

III

MEN said Jack Cardigan was reckless and case-hardened — men meaning cops and reporters and Richmond City's generous sprinkling of gunmen. Something might be added; he was ruthless. As a detective, he'd been hated and feared by more crooks than perhaps any other man in the Department—inspectors, captain, lieutenants and all the rest included. Because he was hard—tough—rough on rats; rats being one of his favorite nicknames applied to a species of human being that shoots in the dark and aims for the back.

For three years Joe Hanley had been his partner, in the Department. In life, they'd been partners for years—and the bond of friendship had been welded firmly and topped off with the marriage of Cardigan's sister Marion to Joe. It was a far, long cry from that happy, flowered day to the day when Marion and Cardigan rode home from the cemetery, after the burial of Joe. Cardigan held his sister in his arms on the slow journey. There was nothing he could say to comfort her. Pity, condolence, make empty, meaningless words on such a tragic day. So he held her in his arms and let her sob.

His own face was a mask, grim and carven, the eyes dark and close-lidded. Home, he put her into the hands of their mother. No one spoke. Glances, gestures, conveyed far more. For a long while he sat alone, motionless and thoughtful. The funeral was over, but the dread pall of it still lingered. Even the house seemed to take on a personality of mourning—quiet and hollow and reverent.

A week later Cardigan sat in a speakeasy on the outer circle of Richmond City's theatrical district. He was sipping a dry Martini when Kennedy of the *Free Press* drifted in and joined him.

"What's the idea of shaking your job, Cardigan?"

"What's that to you?"

"Or were you *told* to resign?"

"Maybe."

Kennedy chuckled. "Sounds more like it. What you get for bringing in Clark. Lord, that was a joke! His lawyer was a sharp egg. Clark played

the dope all through. Bet his lawyer spent nights drilling him how to act. Clark was just a hired chauffeur. How did he know the plates were stolen? He was hired a week before the mess out on Webster Road to drive a car. They gave him a car to drive. The whole thing was a joke, and the presenting attorney gave the defense every possible opening. What are you doing now?"

"Nothing. Taking life easy."

"Don't make me laugh!"

"Well, have it your way."

"Listen, Cardigan," said Kennedy. "You know a lot. The *Free Press* would sell its shirt to get some straight dope from you. That's no boloney. I mean it. I've got the whole thing figured out, but what we need is a story where we can omit the 'alleged' crap. Man, you can clean up!"

"Yeah?" Cardigan laughed softly. "Be yourself, Kennedy. Run along. You're wasting time on me."

"I don't know about that."

"Then learn."

Kennedy had a highball and went on his way. Alone, Cardigan took another drink, and looked at his watch. It was half-past eight at night. He looked across at the telephone on the wall. He drained his glass and lit a cigarette.

The telephone rang. He got up and beat the owner to it. "This is for me," he said, and took off the receiver. "You, Pete? . . . O.K. Be right over."

He hung up, paid for his drinks and shrugged into his dark overcoat. Outside, it was damp and cold, and automobiles hissed by over slushy pavements.

Cardigan did not walk toward the bright glow that marked the beginning of the theatrical district. He bored deeper into the heart of Jockey Street. Where it was dirtiest and darkest, he swung in toward a short flight of broken stone steps, reached a large, ancient door, groped for a bell-button and pressed it. It was opened a moment later by a huge, beetle-browed negro.

"Pete Fink," said Cardigan. "He expects me."

"Who yuh are?" asked the negro.

"None of your damned business."

"I'll get Fink," said the negro and slammed the door in Cardigan's face.

"Takes no chances," muttered Cardigan. "Well, that's good."

Fink opened the door this time, while the negro hovered behind him, his face like shining ebony under the single gas-jet.

"Take a good look, big boy," Cardigan said, as he passed in.

And the negro said, "Got yuh, boss."

Fink led the way up a flight of crooked stairs that creaked under their footfalls. They reached the upper landing. Cardigan placed six doors in a row. One of these Fink opened, and they entered a large, square room, furnished cheaply with odd bits of furniture, no two pieces the same in make or design.

Cardigan stood with his hands in his coat pockets, idly running his eyes about the room.

Fink was leaning against the door he had closed. He was a big, rangy man, with one of his shoulders higher than the other. His nose was a twisted knot; a tawny mustache sagged over his mouth. He had a jaw like a snowplow, and eyes like ice—cold and steady and enigmatic. His hands were big and red and bony. He wore brown corduroy trousers, a blue flannel shirt, a wide belt with an enormous brass buckle. He looked like a tough egg. He wasn't a soft one.

Cardigan sighed and poured himself a drink. He downed it neat, rasped his throat, and looked at the empty glass.

"Good stuff, Pete."

"Cavallo sells the same."

They faced each other. Their eyes met and held and bored one into the other. At last Fink grinned and rocked away from the door, sat down at the table and lit a cigarette. Cardigan sat down opposite him, opened his overcoat and helped himself to one of Fink's cigarettes.

"Well, Pete? . . ."

Fink leaned forward, elbows resting

on the table, his butt jutting from one corner of his mouth and an eye squinted against the smoke that curled upward.

"Six," he said. "I got six."

"Who are they?"

"Chip Slade, Gats Gilman, Luke Kern, Bennie Levy, Chuck Ward and Bat Johnson. All good guns."

"Yeah, I know. How do they feel about it?"

"Cripes, they're ripe!"

"They want to know who's behind you?"

"I said a big guy—somebody big, who's in the know."

Cardigan chuckled. "Remember, Pete, it stays that way. I'm—it sounds like a joke—the mystery man in this. The master mind!" He chuckled again, amusedly, then grew serious. "To come out in the open would be to shoot the whole works. I'm too well known as a gumshoe. But I'll manage this, Pete, and supply the first funds. I've got a measley two thousand saved up, but it's a starter. And I'm out to flop on the bums that got Hanley, my buddy. If everybody holds up his end, you'll all make money and Cavallo and his crowd will get washed out."

"You say the word, Jack. I'm takin' orders from you. The rest take orders from me and no questions asked."

"Good. I'll give you five hundred bucks to buy a second-hand car. Get a big touring. To hell with the looks of it; buy it for the motor—for speed. Buy half-a-dozen high-powered rifles and plenty of ammunition. Pick up some grenades if you can. How about a storehouse?"

"Got one picked—an old farmhouse out on Farmingville Turnpike."

"Sounds good. Rent it for a month."

"It's way out in the sticks," added Fink. "Off the main pike, way in on a lane, and no other house inside of a quarter mile. I can get it for fifty bucks a month."

"Get it. We've got to watch out for tapped wires, though. Here, I'm staying at the Adler House. You know that number. If things get hot and you've got to talk a lot, just call me up and say, 'I've got something to tell you.' I'll hang up and run down to the drug-store on the corner. There's a booth there and I'll get you the number. We'll choose booths all over the city where we can make calls, and we'll get the numbers."

"O.K."

"How about the dinge downstairs?"

"He owns the dump. Sees a lot and says nothin'."

Cardigan ground out his cigarette. "Then it's all set. Get me straight, Fink. Leave the cops alone. Tell your boys that. We're after Cavallo and his rats—not the cops. If the cops show up, run. I've got a grudge against that wop and the crowd he runs with. I'm playing my grudge to a showdown. If I make some jack out of it, all right. But I'm after rats first—not jack. You and your guns can clean up sweet in this racket, if you use your head and move how I tell you."

"I got you, Jack," nodded Fink.

"All right. Let me know when you're all set and I'll map out our first move. Get the rifles, ammunition, grenades. Get a fast car and see that the tires are good." He drew a wad of bills from his pocket. "There's a thousand as a starter."

Fink shoved the money into his pocket and poured another brace of drinks.

"You got guts, Jack," he said, "to chuck the Department—for this."

"Guts, my eye!" clipped Cardigan. "I've got a grudge, Pete, a whale of a grudge—against the dirty, rotten bums that killed the best friend I ever had." He raised his glass. "Down the hatch."

On that they drank.

IV

TWO days later Cardigan was sitting in his room at the Adler House, when the telephone rang. It was the desk, and he said, "Send him up." Then he settled back again in his over-stuffed

easy-chair. It was ten in the morning and he was still in pajamas and bathrobe. On a settee beside him was a detailed map of Richmond City and its suburbs. Here and there he had marked x's, or made penciled notations.

There was a knock on the door and he called, "Come in, Steve."

MacBride came in, closed the door and stood there stroking his chin and regarding Cardigan seriously.

"Sit down," said Cardigan. "Take the load off your feet, Steve. You'll find cigars in the box on the table. How's tricks?"

MacBride took a cigar and eased himself down on a divan. "My day off and I thought I'd drop in and see you."

"Is that all you came for, Steve?"

MacBride lit up and took a couple of puffs before replying. "Not exactly, Jack."

"Spill it."

"Oh, it's not much. Only I was worrying. You still thinking of butting in on Cavallo's racket?"

"What a question! Why'd you suppose I left the Department?"

"M-m-m," droned MacBride. "I wish you hadn't, Jack. You were the best man I had, and, Jack, old boy, you can't buck that crowd. It's madness. You'll get in trouble, and if you make a bad step, you'll get the Department on your neck. You haven't got politics behind you. You'd be out of luck. That's straight. How do you think I'd feel if it came to the point where you faced me as prisoner?"

"I've been thinking about that, Steve," admitted Cardigan. "It's the one thing I'd hate."

"No more than I would." MacBride licked a loose wrapper back into place on his cigar. "Kennedy's been in to see me again. That guy's so nosey and so clever it hurts. Look out for him. *He's* got an idea you're up to something."

"I know. That bird's so sharp he's going to cut himself some day."

"Made any moves yet—I mean, you?"

"Some—getting things ready."

"What's up your sleeve anyway?"

"Steve—" Cardigan paused to flex his lips. "Steve, we've been mighty good friends. We are yet. But I can't tell you. I'm playing a game that can't have any air-holes. You understand?"

MacBride nodded. "I guess so. But I'm worrying, Jack. I've got a hunch you're going to get in wrong and somebody's going to nail you."

"Don't worry. Forget it. If I pull a bone I'll take the consequence. But I'm not counting on pulling a bone. This town is going to shake. Somebody's going to get hurt, and, Steve, before long some pretty high departmental offices are liable to be vacated so damned fast—"

"I'd go easy, Jack."

"I am—feeling my way."

MacBride shrugged and got up. They shook, and the captain went out, a little mournfully and reluctantly.

Ten minutes later the phone rang and Fink asked, "How soon can you come out?"

"Five minutes."

"I'll pick you up at Main and Anderson in the car."

Cardigan hung up and snapped into his clothes. Five minutes later he shot down in the elevator, strode through the lobby and out on to Main Street. Two blocks south was Anderson. He saw the big touring car idling along—the one that Fink had bought for five-fifty; five years old, but it could do seventy-five an hour. The curtains were on, all of them.

The door opened and he hopped in, settled down beside Fink. They pounded down Main Street, swung into a side street to avoid a traffic stop, and cut north until they struck Farmingville Turnpike.

Then Cardigan said, "Well?"

"I got the rifles and ammunition and some grenades," said Fink. "I want to show you the farmhouse. The boys are ripe to go, soon as you say the word."

It took them half an hour to reach the ramshackle farmhouse. It was quite some

distance from the hub of the city. It stood well off the main highway, hidden behind an arm of woods and reached by a narrow lane where the snow still lay. Fink pulled up into the yard and they got out. He had keys and opened the kitchen door. They entered and Cardigan looked it over. Two big rooms and a kitchen downstairs. Three bed-rooms upstairs. Dust, the dust of long neglect, covered the floor. The windows were small and set with many little squares of glass. The place was old, years old. The walls were lined with brick, a relic of days when houses were built to last for more than one generation.

"Just the thing," nodded Cardigan. "Maybe we'll use it tonight."

"Huh?"

"Tonight. Cavallo keeps a lot of his booze on North Street. Know the old milk stables?"

"Yeah."

"That's the place. There are three in a row, all joined together. The one in the middle is our meat. It has sliding doors, and there's always a reserve truck inside."

"How do you know all this, Jack?"

"What do you suppose the Department does, sleep all the time?"

"Oh. . . . I gotcha. Yeah, sure."

"Get your map out."

Fink dived into his pocket, came out with a folder that opened to large dimensions. Cardigan also had his out.

"I've figured out the route you're to take," he said. "Mark these down now, so there'll be no slip up. The truck is a type governed to do thirty-five per and no more. Four speeds ahead. All right." And he proceeded to give Fink precise directions to follow, street by street to Black Hill Road which leads into Farmingville Turnpike. "Got the route all marked?" he asked, as he finished.

"Yeah, all marked."

"Who 'll drive the truck?"

"Bat Johnson and—"

"No—Bat's enough. The rest of you drift along ahead in the touring car and lead the way. One man on a truck 'll cause no suspicion. More might. And get this. Maple Road runs parallel with North street—behind the stables. You park on Maple Road and watch across the lots till you see three blinks from a flashlight. That will mean to come on and take things over. When Bat takes the truck out you boys beat it back across the lots, into the car and fall in ahead of the truck on Avenue C."

"Who's goin' to blink the lights?'

"I am."

"Huh?" Fink seemed incredulous.

"That's what I said. I'm going ahead to see if the road's clear. I'll take care of the watchman. If there's more there —the gang, I mean—we'll give up for the night. And mind this, if you don't see any flashes by ten o'clock, breeze. Be on Maple Road at exactly nine fifty, no sooner or later. If everything turns out all right, if you get the booze out to the farmhouse and away safe, call me up and just say, 'Jake'; that's all. And about the truck. Drive it back and abandon it on Black Hill Road."

"But, hell, Jack, why can't me and the boys bust in the stables and crash the place proper?"

"You would say that, Pete. That's just the way to ball up the whole works. We're not out to butcher our way if we can help it. That's the trouble with you guys. You don't use your head. That's the main reason why Cavallo and his rats are going to blow up. They're too damned free with their gats."

"Um—I guess you're right there, Jack."

"All right, then. Come on, let's breeze. Drive me to the bus line and drop me off."

An hour later Cardigan was eating lunch at his favorite haunt in Jockey Street, with a bottle of Sauterne on the side. It was one of fifteen restaurants circulated throughout the city and owned by a syndicate of brokers that paid a fat sum monthly to the authorities for the privilege. Four were in the financial district, six in the theatrical district, the rest scattered. More would open for

business in time. You didn't need a card. The places were wide, wide open. Where the syndicate got the liquor, was nobody's business.

The Jockey Street place was managed by an ex-saloon keeper named Maloney. Cardigan had been a frequent visitor there since his resignation from the force, and they got on well. This day he called Maloney over and asked him to sit down.

He asked, "Between you and me, what does your outfit pay for good Scotch?"

"That's our business, buddy, if you know what I mean."

"I know what you mean. Come on, I'm *talking* business."

"You in the game?"

"I know somebody who is."

Maloney thought hard. "Sixty-five bucks a case."

Cardigan nodded. "You can get it for fifty-five. Work the deal with your boss and you'll get a rake-off of five bucks on the case."

"Your friend must be hard up."

"He's just starting in business."

"Oh. We'll have to sample it first."

"Sure. But are you on?"

"It sounds good. How—how many cases?"

"Maybe two hundred."

"Cripes!"

"Think it over. Speak to your boss. I'll see you again in a day or so."

He left ten minutes later, pretty certain that he had paved the way nicely. To kill the afternoon, he dropped in at a vaudeville theatre, and ate dinner at the hotel. Later he sat in his room smoking a cigar and going over his plan step by step, searching for a loop-hole. He couldn't see any. Tonight would start the ball rolling. His vengeance would be under way. They'd murdered Joe Hanley. Now they'd pay—pound for pound. It was law of his own making, a hard, raw law—fighting rats on their own ground with their own tactics. Yet he had one advantage; a reasoning, calculating mind, thanks to his service in the Department; strategy first, guns—if it should come to that means—later.

He had a hard crew under him. Pete Fink, a product of the bootleg age—one time in the prize ring, once a sailor. Cardigan knew that he was a tough customer, and he also knew that he could rely on him. The other guns; he relied on Fink to take care of them. He'd arrested Bat Johnson only a year ago for petty larceny. Chip Slade had once felt the rap of his blackjack.

"Hell," he mused, "if they only knew who was behind Fink!"

V

EIGHT-THIRTY came around. Cardigan put on his overcoat and shoved an automatic into his pocket. He took his time. He wandered leisurely out of the hotel, walked a couple of blocks down Main Street and boarded a bus bound for the suburbs. Half an hour later he got off, lit a cigarette and strolled north. He was a little ahead of time, so he went on at ease.

He reached Maple Road, and continued south. Houses were scattered, and fields intervened. Then, squatting dimly in the murk beyond a field of tall grass, the old milk stables. Cardigan paused behind an ancient oak tree and looked at the illuminated dial of his watch. It was nine-thirty-five. His hand slid into his pocket and gripped the butt of his automatic.

He slipped away from the tree, hunched over and weaved his way through tall weeds. His feet slushed through snow. At intervals he paused briefly, to listen. Then he went on, bit by bit, until he reached the old picket fence behind the stables. In this he found a gap and muscled through, and squatted still for a long moment. From his coat he drew a dark handkerchief and fastened it about his face, just below his eyes. His hat brim he pulled lower.

There was a faint yellow glow shining from a window, and toward this Cardigan crept. A shade had been drawn down to within an inch or two of the

bottom of the window. Smoke was drifting from a tin stove chimney. In a moment Cardigan was crouched by the window.

He saw two men sitting in chairs by a little stove. On the stove a kettle was spouting steam. A lantern stood on an empty box nearby. One of the men was asleep. The other was half-heartedly reading a newspaper; Cardigan recognized him, a huge brute of a man called "Dutch" Weber, with a record. The other he placed as Jakie Hart, sometimes called the Creole Kid, a one-time New Orleans wharf rat. A dirty pair, he mused.

Minutes were flying, and so much depended on chance. Cardigan bent down and felt around on the snow. He found a two-foot length of board, and hefted it in his left hand. His right hand still gripped the automatic. Again looking in, he raised the board, set his jaw and crashed the window. The shade snapped up. The man with the paper spun in his chair, clawed at his gun.

But Cardigan had him covered, his head and shoulders thrust through the window.

"Drop that gat, Dutch!" he barked. "You too, Jakie—drop it! Fast, you guys, or you'll get lead in your pants!"

The Creole Kid blinked bleary eyes. Dutch Weber cursed under his breath, his huge face flushing, murder in his gimlet eyes, his big hands writhing. But he dropped his gun, and the Creole Kid imitated him a moment later.

"Stand up—both of you," went on Cardigan. "Face the wall! Move out of turn and God help you!"

"You lousy bum!" snarled Weber.

"Can that crap, buddy! About face!" bit off Cardigan.

Sullenly they faced the wall, hands raised.

A moment later Cardigan was in the room. He yanked down the shade, picked up the men's discarded guns, thrust them into his pockets. And from his pockets he drew two pairs of manacles.

"Back up six paces, Dutch! Stay where you are, Jakie! Never mind looking, Dutch—just back up. Now put your hands behind your back. Don't get funny, either." In a flash he had the manacles on Weber. "Get over against the wall again. Move!" He jabbed the muzzle of his gun in Weber's back. "Now you, Jakie—back up!"

In a moment he had the other pair of bracelets on the Creole Kid, and forced him back against the wall. Then he took a small bottle of chloroform from his pocket and saturated a handkerchief.

"Back up again, Jakie! As you are, Dutch!"

He clamped his arm around the Creole Kid's neck, forced the handkerchief against his nostrils and into his mouth, held it there, while he still warned Weber to stay where he was. Presently the Creole Kid went limp, relaxed, and Cardigan let him fall to the floor, unconscious.

Then he soaked another handkerchief, approached Weber and planted his gun in the big man's ribs.

"Not a stir, big boy!"

His left hand shot out, smacked the saturated handkerchief against Weber's mouth. The big man struggled, but Cardigan reminded him of the gun.

"Damn your soul!" snarled Weber in muffled tones.

"Shut your trap!"

In a short time Weber joined the Creole Kid on the floor, muttering vaguely, his hands twitching slower and slower. Cardigan pocketed his gun, produced a coil of thin, strong wire and bound their ankles. Then he ripped away strips of their shirts and bound the handkerchiefs securely on their mouths. From Weber's pockets he took a ring of keys.

With his flashlight he started a quick, systematic search of the stables. The large, covered truck was in the main stable. Its tank registered seven gallons of gasoline. Under tarpaulins he saw case upon case of liquor—between two and three hundred. He also saw ten

barrels of wine. These he tipped over and sprung the spigots, and the wine gurgled and flowed on the dirt floor.

Chuckling, he hurried into the back room, blew out the lantern and pulled up the shade on the window. He raised his flashlight and blinked it three times. Then he opened the back door, sped into the main stable and unlocked the big sliding doors, but did not open them.

He turned, jumped to a ladder and climbed up to a small loft, drew the ladder up after him. Then he lay flat on his stomach in the pitch gloom, waited and listened. After a few moments he heard a door creak, and then footsteps—saw the reflection of a flashlight in the back room.

"Huh," muttered a voice, "the Chief sure paved the way. Lookit the way them two babies is tied up!"

"Shut up, Bat. Come on, gang." That was Fink.

The beam of light jumped into the stable. Figures loomed in. The flash settled on the draining barrels. Someone chuckled.

"What he can't take he busts," said a voice. "This Chief knows his termaters, what I mean!"

The beam of light swept around the stable and found the stacked cases of liquor.

"Ba-by!" exclaimed someone, softly.

"Cut the gab!" hissed Fink. "Step to it! There's the truck! Come on, guys!"

Cardigan watched them spread out. They hauled off the tarpaulins. Two men jumped into the truck. The others leaped to the cases of liquor. They worked swiftly and for the most part silently, passing the cases to the pair in the truck, who stacked them rapidly.

One muttered, "Y' know, first off I thought this Chief was just a guy wit' brains an' no guts. I mean, like he wanted us to do his dirty work—"

"Pipe down, Gats!" snapped Fink. "Y' see he's got guts, don't you now?"

"Sure. I'm all for him."

"You better be," muttered Fink. "Any one o' you guys that thinks he ain't 's got a lot to learn."

"Where's he now?"

"None o' your business!" said Fink. "Prob'ly ridin' home in a bus or somethin'. Nemmine the talk. Step on it."

Cardigan smiled in the darkness. Yes, he could trust Fink; no doubt of it, now. Not even Fink knew he was up there in the loft, a silent watcher.

The minutes dragged by. Case after case went into the truck. The pile on the floor grew smaller and smaller. The men worked rapidly, and now silently. Cardigan looked at his watch. Half-past ten. He was stiff from holding his tense position.

"Cripes, what a load!" a voice said hoarsely.

"How many more?"

"Ten."

"That," said Fink, " 'll make two-hundred-and-forty-two."

"Ba-by!"

Cardigan saw the last case go in. Then Fink and two others spread tarpaulins over the rear and lashed them to the sides.

"All right, Bat," he said.

Bat Johnson climbed up into the seat, juggled the transmission lever. Another man grabbed the crank, heaved on it. The motor spat, barked, and then pounded regularly. Two men jumped to the doors, slid them back. They looked out, came back in and one said, "Clear! Let her go!"

Bat shoved into gear and the big truck rumbled out. The doors were pulled shut. The men bunched together and at a word from Fink slipped out through the back door.

Three minutes later Cardigan dropped from the loft. He strode into the back room, snapped on his flash, played its beam on the Creole Kid and Dutch Weber, still unconscious. Then he dropped their keys and guns beside them, snapped off his flash and made for the door.

With a brittle little chuckle he went out, crossed the fields and struck Maple

Road. He sought the bus line by a different route than the one by which he had reached the stables. At a quarter to twelve he entered his room, took off his coat and dropped into an easy-chair. He lit a cigar and relaxed, a little weary after the strenuous night.

But deep within him there was a great calm. He thought of Joe, and of his widowed sister. He thought, too, of other cops who had met death in strange back-alleys at the hands of rats who always shot from the rear. What protection was a shield nowadays? Protection! He grimaced. More a target! But mainly it was Joe he thought of—mild-mannered, easy-going Joe. Joe with two bullets in him, out on Webster Road. . . .

At half-past one the telephone rang. He picked it up.

"'Jake'," said Fink.

"'Jake'," said Cardigan, and hung up.

VI

IT did not get into the papers. Things like this don't. But the underworld rumbled ominously, and the echoes seeped into the Department, but got no further. The law-abiding element of Richmond City went about its daily tasks and pleasures as usual, all ignorant of the fact that in the world of shadows, wolves were growling and baring hungry fangs.

The very next afternoon MacBride dropped in to see Cardigan.

"Well, Jack," he said.

And Cardigan said, "Well?"

"M-m-m, you did it."

"You mean Cavallo?"

MacBride nodded.

Cardigan chuckled.

"We got a whiff of it this morning," went on MacBride. "Cavallo must have gone to his brother-in-law Diorio and I guess Diorio went to his friend Alderman Pozzo and then Pozzo had a chat with State's Attorney Mulroy. Jack, for God's sake, watch your step!"

"I am. Why, do they suspect?"

"No, but—" MacBride clenched his fists and gritted his teeth. "I shouldn't be telling you this Jack. But—we're—old friends, and I'd like to see that dago wiped out. And I guess—if I was younger and single—and a buddy of mine—like Joe was to you—was bumped off, I'd do the same. Maybe I wouldn't. Maybe I wouldn't have the guts. But, Jack, I've got to tell you, for old times' sake. McGinley and Kline, of the State's Attorney's office, have been detailed to get the guys who flopped on Cavallo's parade!"

"Oh, yes?"

"Yes. For my sake, Jack, shake this racket. You can't beat it. You see what you've got against you?"

Cardigan nodded. "I know, Steve. But I've started, and I'm not going to let the thing just hang in the air. The more I think of Cavallo and Bert Geer and Monkey Burns and all that crowd, the more I want to blow up their racket. Imagine Pozzo for Alderman—a guy that can hardly speak English and calls himself a one hundred per cent American! Cavallo's bulwark! Mulroy having to take these wops' part because they put him in office, and getting a rake-off from their proceeds."

"I know, Jack, I know. But—"

"No, sir, Steve. I'm playing this to a showdown, and somebody's going to get hurt in the wind-up."

"It might be you, Jack."

"Here's hoping it won't."

"No one gets anywhere today trying to be a martyr."

Cardigan laughed shortly. "Martyr! You think *I'm* taking the godly role of a martyr? Hell, no! I'm just an ordinary guy who's sore as a boil. I'm a guy whose buddy got a dirty break, and I'm starting to go after these lads the only way they can be reached."

MacBride shrugged and remained silent. Then he got up, shook Cardigan's hand and went out.

A little later the phone rang and Fink said, "I got somethin' to tell you."

"All right," replied Cardigan briskly.

A few minutes later he walked into a drug-store on the corner, stepped into the booth and closed the door. A minute, and the bell rang.

"O.K., Pete," he said.

Fink explained, "Meet me in the dump on Jockey Street in half an hour. I've got a sample, and it's sure powerful stuff. I'll be waitin' outside the door there. Everything is jake, and the boys are feelin' good but wonderin' about their divvy."

"Be over," said Cardigan.

When, later, he strolled down Jockey Street, he saw Fink cross the street, pause on the steps of their rendezvous, look his way, and then pass inside. Cardigan swung up the steps and the door opened. He went in and Fink led the way up to the latter's room. The big man drew a pint flask from his pocket.

"They're all in pints," he explained. "Try it."

Cardigan took a pull on the bottle and let the liquor burn in. "Good," he nodded. "The best I've tasted."

Fink grinned. "If that stuff ain't come across the pond I don't know Scotch. It's the first time I ain't drunk dish water in a long time. D' you figger Cavallo's sore?"

"Sore!" echoed Cardigan, and laughed on it.

"Yeah," droned Fink, "I guess he's lookin' to kill. Um. Now the stuff's out there in the farmhouse, what?"

"I'll know by tonight. Keep your shirt on."

"I ain't worryin'. The gang. They're achin' to see some jack and have a good time."

"You tell 'em to watch their step, Pete. It's hard lines for any guy pulls a bone. We're not through yet. It would be just like Chip Slade, for instance, to doll up in new duds, pick up a broad, get tight to the eyes and blabber. We've got to watch out for that, Pete."

"Yeah, I know, Jack. I been keepin' my eye on Chip."

"I'll see you here tonight, Pete."

Cardigan went out with the pint flask on his hip and dropped in to see Maloney in the speakeasy. He talked business to him, and let him take a drink from the bottle.

"Boy!" whistled Maloney. "That's *Scotch*, what I mean!"

"What's the news?"

"The boss says all right, if he likes the stuff. Fifty-five a case."

"I can get two-hundred-and-forty cases. He can have the lot or none, and he's got to act fast. This is no young stuff—"

"Hell, I know! Ain't I just tasted it? And me—I get my share, when?"

"When your boss pays, you get twelve-hundred bucks, and then forget about everything. There are no names necessary."

"Of course not," nodded Maloney. "How do you get the money?"

"Your boss 'll send it to John D. Brown, at a post office box. You'll get the box number later. Send it in a plain package, with no return address. Thirteen thousand and two hundred dollars in one hundred dollar bills."

"Insure it?"

"Lord, no! Just first class—that's the safest way to send stuff through the mails. It beats registered mail four ways from the jack. I never lost a first class letter, but I've lost 'em registered and I've lost insured packages. A man will pick up the letter at the post office." He thought for a moment. "Get the dope from your boss, and let's know where the booze goes."

"I ought to get my share first," demurred Maloney.

"I know. You think I'll skip. You'll get yours through the mail, too. That's the proposition. It's up to you."

"I'll take the chance." Maloney got up. "Come in at six."

Cardigan nodded and left. He took a box at a suburban post office under the name of John D. Brown. When he met Maloney at six that night the ex-saloon keeper was flushed with elation. Every-

thing was settled, and the liquor was to be delivered as soon as possible.

"That means tonight," put in Cardigan.

"The boss stores it at the Tumbledown Inn. Say the word and there'll be somebody there tonight to meet the truck."

"It'll be delivered sometime after midnight."

With that Cardigan went out and met Fink in the latter's hideout. He explained what had transpired, and Fink rubbed his hands in joyful anticipation.

"I know where I can get a truck, Jack. Leave it to me."

"I am," said Cardigan.

He explained in detail how the liquor should be transported, how Bat Johnson should drive the truck alone and the others ride in the touring car ahead. The Tumbledown Inn was on Farmingville Turnpike, four miles beyond the farmhouse where the liquor was stored at present.

"It's a cinch," said Fink.

"When it's all over, ring me up and say the O. K. word."

They parted, and Cardigan headed for the Adler House. He had proved a successful general on his first try. He believed he could repeat a second time, and then some more. He turned in at eight and set his alarm to wake him at one. He figured that he should get a report from Fink at about two.

When he got up at one a. m., he dressed, in the event of an emergency. He drank some hot black coffee from a thermos and ate some sandwiches which he had brought up before. Then he lounged on a divan with a cigar and watched the clock. The hands moved around the hour and passed two. They passed two-thirty and wheeled on toward three. At three, Cardigan sat up.

He looked grave, a bit tight-lipped. He stared at the telephone. It was black and silent. The hotel was silent as a tomb. Up from the street floated the sound of a lone trolley car rattling across a switch. He sat down, clasping his hands around one knee, tapping an impatient foot. Half-past three.

"Something's gone wrong," he muttered. He cracked fist into palm, cursed under his breath, bitterly.

Dawn came, and then the sun. And still no word from Pete Fink.

Cardigan put on his overcoat and went out. He bought a paper, thinking he might find some clue there, but he reasoned that if anything had happened in the early hours, the morning papers wouldn't have it yet. The next edition might. He ate breakfast in a dairy restaurant. Then, reasoning that he ought to be at his room in case Fink might call, he hurried back.

At nine Fink called. He said two words, "My room."

"Right," said Cardigan.

VII

TWENTY minutes later he was striding down Jockey Street. The negro let him in and he climbed the rickety staircase. He knocked at Fink's door. There was a slow movement.

Then, "You, Jack?"

"Yes, Pete."

The door opened. Cardigan went in. Fink was dropping back into a chair.

"Lock it," he muttered.

His face was haggard. His left arm was in a sling, and blotches of dry blood showed on the bandage.

"I thought so," said Cardigan.

"Yeah," nodded Fink, and forced a wan grin. "They got Bat."

Cardigan sat down. "Go on."

"They got Bat. It was all a accident. We delivered the booze and was on the way back. We took Prairie Boulevard. Bat wanted to bring back the truck. The tourin' car got a flat and we stopped to make a change. Bat went ahead slow all by his merry lonesome. We got the spare on, all right, and whooped it up to catch him. You know where Prairie Boulevard goes through them deep woods. It's pretty lonely there.

"Well, our headlights pick up Bat and

he's stalled. But we see another car stopped in front of him, facing him. It looks phony, and we take it easy. We see some guys standin' around on the road, but they duck for the car. We stop our car and wait. We think maybe they're dicks, see. Then their car starts and roars towards us. It looks like they're goin' to crash us, but they cut around and slam by, scrapin' our mudguard. A lot of guns bust loose and I'm socked in the arm. Chip gets his cheek opened. Nobody else is hurt. Gats turns around and empties his rod at the back of it. I don't know who he hit, but the car kept goin'.

"I get out, holdin' my arm and Bennie tears off some of his shirt and sops up the blood. Chip is holdin' his cheek and cursin' a blue streak. Gats runs up to the truck and we go after him. Bat is layin' on the road, pretty still. Him and Gats was buddies, you know. You should hear Gats curse!

"Bat is dyin'. They'd busted his knob with a blackjack. He says he was ridin' along when this car stopped him. See, just by accident. Monkey Burns and Bert Geer and two others. They smell there was booze in the truck, and ask him what's he been doin'. He tells them where they can go. They wanter know who he's been runnin' booze for. He ain't talkin'. They sock him, but he don't chirp. That's Bat all over. More you sock him the worse stubborn he gets. Gawd, they batted hell outta him! Ugh! Then they see us. Bat croaks after he spiels us his story. Poor Bat. He was a good shuffer."

Cardigan stared at the floor for a long minute, his hands clenched.

Fink was saying, "I took the plates off the truck and disfiggered the engine number and the serial number with a couple o' shots. Then we drove to the farmhouse. The boys are there now. I got here alone, quick as I could. I could ha' sent one o' the boys to call you up, but I didn't want any o' 'em to know where you was."

"You're aces up in a pinch, Pete," said Cardigan, and he meant it.

"I did the best I could."

"I'll say you did. Did Monkey and his gang see you boys?"

"No. And Bat didn't tell 'em. But they know, like everybody else, that Bat was buddies with Gats, and they'll be huntin' Gats. And Gats has gone wild. He wants to go out gunnin' for them guys. He swears he'll do it. And Gats is the best damn gunman I know about."

"You've got to keep him under cover."

"Yeah. I got to get back to the farmhouse. Bandage this arm tight so I can put it in a sleeve. I can't go walkin' around too much with a sling. It'll hurt without it, but what the hell."

"Good man, Pete. Get out there, see how things are. I'll hang around the corner drug-store between two and three. Call me there from a booth and give me a line."

When he had bandaged Fink's arm, he patted the big man on the back and left him. Below, in the street, he ran into Kennedy, of the *Free Press,* leaning indolently against a lamp-post. He brought up short, his breath almost taken away.

"Hello, Cardigan," said the reporter in his tired way. "What's the attraction?"

"You trying to crack wise, Kennedy?"

"Who, me? No-o, not me, Cardigan. See this yet?" He handed Cardigan the latest edition of the *Free Press.*

Rival Bootleg Gangs Clash

That was the headline. Something about an abandoned truck, empty, with license plates gone and engine number disfigured. Blood on the road. Empty cartridges. Nearby trees showing bullet marks. A farmer beyond the woods had heard the shooting about half-past one a. m. No cops on the job. The farmer himself had come out to investigate and reported the abandoned truck. It looked like the beginning of a gang feud.

Cardigan looked up. "Well that's news, Kennedy."

"Is it?" Kennedy had a tantalizing way of smiling.

"I'm in a hurry," said Cardigan, and started off.

Kennedy fell into step beside him. "I'm not green, Cardigan. You ought to know that by this time. And I know that one of the gangs was Cavallo's. Now the other gang. . . Cardigan, be a sport."

"What do you mean?"

"Tell me about it."

"You're all wet, Kennedy."

"Oh, no I'm not. Listen, Cardigan. You're not pulling the wool over this baby's eyes. The Department knows who the guy was that was bumped off and then carried away by his buddies. They got the dope from Cavallo's friends —maybe Diorio to Pozzo to Mulroy. Then they tell the Department to get busy—just like that, and they're spreading for somebody. The riot squad's on pins and needles, waiting for another break. Now, it would take guts to head a gang to buck that outfit—you tell me, Cardigan."

Cardigan laughed. "Kennedy, you're funny. So long." He crossed the street and left Kennedy in perplexed indecision.

But he realized that Kennedy was one man he'd have to look out for. That news hound, in other words, knew his onions. He was nobody's fool.

After luncheon Cardigan went out to the suburban post office, opened his box and took out a solitary package. He thrust it into his pocket and returned to his hotel. There he opened it, and found thirteen thousand, two hundred dollars. Twelve hundred he put in a plain envelope and addressed it to Maloney. In each of five plain envelopes he placed a thousand dollars, for Pete Fink's boys. For Pete he placed aside two thousand. He lost no time in mailing Maloney's letter.

Later, he was at the booth in the corner drug-store to get Fink's prearranged call. Fink mentioned his room, but Cardigan objected, remembering Kennedy, and told Fink to pick him up at a street corner well out of the city. Then he hung up and took a bus out, got off at the street he had named, and waited for Fink. He did not have to wait long. The touring car came up, and Fink was driving with his one good arm. Cardigan got in and they rolled off.

"Gats," said Fink. "He slipped out on the boys. He's out gunnin' for the guys who got Bat Johnson."

"What!"

"Yup."

Cardigan saw his nicely made plans toppling to ruin. This was one of those things the best of tacticians cannot foresee. An accident. A bad break. Gats gone gun-mad because his buddy 'd been killed by the wops.

"We've got to get him," he said.

"Yeah, but where?"

Cardigan cursed the luck. Then he said, "Well, I've got the money. It's all here. A thousand each for the boys. Two thousand for you. Twelve hundred went to the go-between for the booze." He passed over the envelopes. "That'll make the boys feel better." After a moment he said, "The riot squad's ready for action."

"It won't take long, if we don't get Gats. He'll start the fireworks sure as hell."

"Drop me off when the next bus comes along. Look for Gats. Go to all the places you think he'd be. Ring me at the hotel and say 'Jake' if you get him. Then stay out at the farm—all of you—until this blows over."

A few minutes later he got out of the car, boarded a bus and went back to his hotel. He was very much on edge, and he mused that no matter how perfectly you lay a plan, something is liable to happen that will bring down the whole framework.

At four o'clock the telephone rang, and Fink said, "Jake."

"Jake," said Cardigan.

A great burden was automatically lifted from his mind. He even whistled as he got into his bath. He hummed

while he shaved. Then he dressed, spent half an hour with a cigar and the evening paper, and at five-thirty put on his overcoat and went out. As he swung out of the hotel, he heard the scream of a siren. He looked up the street.

Three police cars were roaring down Main Street. Traffic scattered. People gathered on the curb. The three cars shot by the hotel doing fifty miles an hour. They were packed with policemen, and automatic rifles were clamped on the sides. The sirens snarled madly.

Cardigan's breath stuck in his throat. A chill danced up and down his spine. Then his jaw set and he crossed to a taxicab.

"Hit Farmingville Turnpike," he clipped, and jumped in.

He started to close the door, but something held it. He turned around. Kennedy was climbing in after him.

"Mind if I go?"

Cardigan sank into his seat, his fists clenched. But he managed to grin. "Sure. The old gumshoe instinct in me always follows a riot call. I'm anxious to see what this is all about."

"Yeah?" smiled Kennedy.

"Yeah. I'm in the dark, just like you."

Kennedy frowned after the manner of a man who wonders if after all he isn't wrong in what he'd been supposing.

VIII

CARDIGAN had a hard time masking his inner emotions. He said to the chauffeur, "Follow those police cars. "It's all right. We're reporters."

Kennedy lit a cigarette. "You've got me guessing, Cardigan."

"Me? Same here, Kennedy. You've got me guessing, too."

"Have a butt."

"Thanks." It was casual, everything he said, but inside of him there was turmoil. What was going on? What had happened to Fink and the boys? He'd formed a strange liking for Pete Fink. In his own way Pete had proved his fidelity, his worth.

The sirens went on screaming. People were still looking out of windows when the taxi shot past in the wake of the police cars. Pedestrians had gathered on street corners and were speculating. Some were talking to traffic cops, asking questions. The cops only grinned and shrugged and waved them away. Other cars were joining in the impromptu parade, breaking all speed laws. The people had been reading of a fresh outbreak in gangdom, of a bitter gang feud. They were obsessed now, rushing to get a bird's-eye view, for human nature is fundamentally melodramatic and its curiosity very close to the morbid.

It was already dark, in the early winter gloom. The taxi struck Farmingville Turnpike, fell into the stream of vehicles that pounded along. Horns tooted, and big, high-powered cars shot by so fast that the taxi seemed to be standing still. Mob curiosity was at its peak. Anything draws it—a fire, an accident, a soap-box orator, a brawl between school-boys, a man painting a flag-pole.

Then suddenly the cars began parking. In the gleam of the headlights two policemen with drawn nightsticks were shouting hoarsely, waving the people away.

"I guess we get out here," said Kennedy.

"Looks that way."

"Come on."

Cardigan paid the fare and they walked ahead. Kennedy showed his card and Cardigan went through with him. They strode briskly along the edge of the woods.

"Hear it?" asked Kennedy.

Cardigan heard it— the rattle of gun fire. Yes, the farmhouse. Alternate waves of heat and cold passed over him. The shadows in the woods were pitch black. Soon they could see the flash of guns, hear the brittle hammer-

ing of a machine-gun, firing in spasmodic bursts.

A figure in plainclothes loomed before them.

"Hello, Mac," said Kennedy.

"Who's your friend?" muttered the captain.

"Cardigan."

"Oh-o!"

Kennedy pushed on. Cardigan stopped and MacBride came closer.

"Well, Jack, you see?"

Cardigan bit his lip. "What are you doing, blowing the place up?"

"Yes. Captain McGurk in charge."

"How'd it start?"

"Headquarters got a phone call about a lot of shooting going on out here."

Cardigan growled. "Can't you get 'em to offer a truce? God, Steve, it's pure slaughter!"

He was thinking of Pete Fink and the other boys, trapped in the house.

"There's no use. We came up in the bushes and let go with a machine-gun as a warning. A lot of rifle fire was our answer. This looks like the end."

"Cripes, Steve, stop it—stop it!" He lunged ahead.

MacBride grabbed him, held him in a grip of steel.

"Easy, Jack. You can't do a thing. Don't be a fool. You took the chance and this is the result."

"Let me go, Steve—let go!"

"No, dammit—no! By God, if you make a move I'll crack you over the head!"

"You will, will you?"

"So help me!"

Cardigan swore and heaved in MacBrides' grasp. They struggled, weaving about, silent and grim. They crashed deeper into the bushes. Then MacBride struck, and Cardigan groaned and slumped down.

MacBride knelt beside him, white-faced and panting. "Jack, old boy, you hurt much? I didn't mean to hit so hard . . . Jack, but you can't do a thing. It's the breaks of the racket. God! . . ." He was rubbing Cardigan's hand.

The battle was still on. Daggers of flame slashed through the dark. Lead drummed against the walls of the house, shattered the windows, pumped into the rooms. Spurts of flame darted from the house. A policeman crumpled. Another heaved up, clutching at his chest, and screamed.

"Oh, God!" groaned MacBride.

Captain McGurk, in charge, swore bitterly. He looked around. "That's three they got. We'll have to give 'em the works. Charlie, you got the grenades?"

"Yes, Cap'n."

"Go to it."

A machine-gun, silent for a moment, cut loose with a stuttering fusillade that raked every window in sight. Intermittent flashes came from the windows. Lead slugs rattled through the branches and thickets. The breeze of evening carried acrid powder smoke. The men in the bushes moved about warily.

Cardigan lay in a daze, conscious of the shots and the din, but in a vague, dreamy way. He wanted to yell out, and he imagined he was yelling, at the top of his lungs, but actually his lips moved only in a soundless whisper. His head throbbed with pain. MacBride had clipped him not too gently. And the captain was now bent over him, with one arm beneath him, rocking him.

The man called Charlie had worked his way closer, crawling on hands and knees, from tree to tree. Finally he stood up, and his arm swung. A small object wheeled through the dark, smacked on the roof of the house. There was a terrific explosion, and a sheet of ghastly flame billowed outward. Stones and bits of timber sang through space, clattered in the woods. The roof caved in, parts of the walls toppled in a smother of smoke and dust.

Out of the chaos groped a man, with hands upraised. He stumbled, sprawled and hit the earth like a log. He never moved once after that. Another crawled out of the ruins, turned over on his back and lay as still as the first. The policemen advanced out of the woods. Nothing stopped them now. They closed in around the house, entered here and there through torn gaps.

MacBride hauled Cardigan to his feet, put on his hat. "You've got to get out of this, Jack," he muttered.

Cardigan was able to stumble.

"It's all over," said MacBride.

He half-dragged him back through the woods to the road, walked him along it.

"Brace up!" he ground out. "I'll put you in a taxi. Look natural. Keep your hat down, your collar up. Get back to your hotel. Stay there, for God's sake. It's all over, you hear? There is no use making a fool of yourself."

They found a taxi, and Cardigan got in. MacBride gripped his hand.

"Good luck, Jack!"

"Thanks, Steve."

Cardigan rode to his hotel in a sunken mood. He got out, paid his fare, and sagged up to his room. He locked the door and slumped into a chair. He groped for a cigarette and lit it, and stared gloomily into space. He muttered something old—something about plans of mice and men . . .

"Hell!" he mumbled, and sank lower.

Ten minutes later the telephone rang. He looked at it darkly. He didn't know whether he should answer it. But he got up, laid his hand on it, then took off the receiver.

"Hello," he muttered.

"Jack—my room," said Fink, and that was all.

Cardigan snapped out of his mood, sucked in a hot breath. He slammed down the receiver and dived for his overcoat.

IX

HE climbed the rickety stairs in the ancient house in Jockey Street. He did not know what to expect. He paused a whole minute before the door until he knocked. Then he rapped. There was the sound of quick steps. Then the door swung open and Fink loomed there, grinning. He pulled Cardigan in, closed the door and locked it.

"Park your hips, Jack," he rumbled. "Have a drink."

Cardigan crossed the room, dropped to a chair and slopped liquor into a glass. He held it up. "I need this." He downed it neat. "Well?"

Fink rubbed his big hand along his thigh vigorously. "Well, Cavallo and his gang oughta be done for. Cripes, it was a great break for us! Well, I picked up Gats all right, and we drove back to the farmhouse. Then I figgered maybe one o' Cavallo's guns was trailin' us. I seen a closed coupé follerin' all the way out, but I didn't let on. I swung in by the farm and I saw this coupé slow down and then shoot ahead.

"I put Gats in with the boys, and then I went out and hid in the bushes by the road. An hour later I see a big tourin' car stop down the road and a guy get out. It was Monkey Burns. I run back to the house and plan a trap. I pull down the shades and leave a light lit. Then me and the boys skin out and hide in the bushes with our rifles.

"Little later the bums sneak up. Monkey and Cavallo and Bert Geer and six others. They creep up on the house, and Monkey tries a door. It's open. He turns to his guns and whispers and they all bunch. Then they crash the door and go in shootin'. Before they know what's what, Gats busts loose with his gun and gets the last mutt goin' in. They see they're trapped and they slam the door.

"We surround the place. Then I

explain things to the boys. Then I drive off in the car, get to a booth and call Police Headquarters and tell 'em a gun-fight's goin' on out there. Then I drive back and park up the road a bit. The boys was takin' pot-shots at the winders now and then. I tell 'em what I done and then run back to the road. When I see a mob o' cars whoopin' down, I whistle and the boys beat it through the woods. We sit in the car until we hear guns goin'. Then we know the cops is at it, and Cavallo and his bums still thinkin' it's us. Then we drive off, and the boys scatter in the city. Just like that."

Cardigan regarded Fink for a long moment. Then he wagged his head. "Pete, you've got a sight more brains than I ever gave you credit for. Every man in that house was killed."

"Humph. What ammunition we saved. So the cops got 'em after all. Well, who has more right than the cops?"

Cardigan went back to his hotel with a light heart. He turned in, slept well, and got the whole thing in the morning extras. At ten MacBride came in to see him. The captain looked full of news.

"Well, you know it all by this time, eh, Jack?" he asked.

"Yes."

"No, you don't." MacBride sat down and took off his hat. "There's a big shake-up. Cavallo and all his rats were wiped out last night. But Cavallo's brother-in-law, Diorio, president of the Hard Club, goes wild this morning. He got in an argument with Pozzo, his friend, the alderman, and blamed him for it all. Claimed Cavallo was framed because he knew too much—framed by Pozzo and Mulroy. It wound up by Pozzo getting shot. Pozzo passed the buck and drew in State's Attorney Mulroy. Kennedy, that wiseacre reporter, crashed in on the row and got the whole story. What dirt they raked up! It's something nobody can hush. Diorio was pinched and he sprung the whole rotten story of graft and quashed criminal cases. Pozzo threatened to have him sent up for twenty years, but Pozzo can't do a thing. He's in the net. So is Mulroy. The governor's wires have been buzzing, and in a short time we're going to see a new state's attorney and a new alderman. It's the biggest shake-up in the history of the city. And you, Jack, in your own little way, caused it, thank God!"

Cardigan smiled. "Not me, Steve—exactly."

"Who, then?"

Cardigan shrugged. "Well, let it drop. A lucky break—and a certain friend of mine." He grew grave. "Now I'm satisfied. Joe Hanley, my buddy, is vindicated. I swore he would be. I was counting on some good breaks. For a while it looked like I was wrong. But the good ones came in the end."

MacBride nodded. "It's funny, there wasn't a trace of the gang that was riding Cavallo and his guns—not a trace."

Cardigan grinned. "I hoped there wouldn't be."

"M-m-m," mused MacBride. "Well, what are you going to do now?"

"That's a question,' replied Cardigan. "I was thinking of starting a detective agency. I know the ropes, and I'm through with the Department, and I know where I can get a good right-hand man."

"Who's that?"

Cardigan chuckled. "You may meet him some day, Steve."

He was thinking of Pete Fink.

DOG EATS DOG by Frederick L. Nebel

Another remarkable story of "The Crimes of Richmond City"

IN OCTOBER BLACK MASK

Red Wings

By RAOUL F. WHITFIELD

BORDER BRAND ADVENTURES—IV

Antonio Flores, the fighting, flying bandit leader, puts over a fast one on Ben Breed, the Federal op, and Mac, the ex-flier. A battle on the ground and a battle in the air.

THE red street car clattered over the bridge. It was very hot, and the odors in the car were not so good. I sat between a fat Mexican woman with two kids on her ample lap—and an ancient Mex gent whose breath was a combination of *tequila* and any number of warm, native dishes. There wasn't much water in the Rio Grande, and the mud produced another odor.

The car reached the Juarez side of the river, and the Inspectors boarded her. I lifted my El Paso paper, and watched the little Mex seated across from me. He seemed very sleepy; his small, black eyes were almost closed. But he wasn't sleepy. He'd been tagging me around El Paso for more than an hour, and now he was riding across the Border with me. I was interested.

The Inspector lowered my paper and stared at me. His face was expressionless. He moved on up the car. He poked in the bag a Mex woman held on her lap, muttered to himself, and dropped off the front end of the car. I raised my paper again. The insignificant Mex had his lids almost closed as I glanced over the top of the sheet. He had a pock-marked face and a black, drooping mustache; wore a soiled lightweight suit and a battered hat.

The American Inspector came through the car. He paid little attention to the Mexican passengers, and not so much to the Americans. He dropped off the front step—the car got into motion jerkily. I lowered my paper, jumped to my feet, took three steps toward the front platform of the car. Then I twisted my head. The little Mex was

stiff in his seat—his dark eyes were wide.

I stared out of the window behind him, swore softly, went back to the seat and dropped down. I didn't smile. The Mex closed his eyes again. I wasn't suspicious of him now. Not at all—I was *sure*. My little faked break for the platform had shown me that I was his man.

It was around five o'clock. Ben Breed had left me three hours before—and had told me to meet him at *El Pajaro's* place, at five-thirty. I'd started early. And, even so, it looked as though I might be late arriving. One thing was sure—the pock-marked Mex wouldn't be trailing me when I went into the 'dobe shack three blocks off the Juarez main street. Not to "the Bird's" place. Not with Breed inside, and with something important on.

The street car rattled southward for about four blocks. Then it turned to the west. Main street. About five blocks in this direction—then it would turn northward, cross the river again. At the third block I got up, went to the platform, dropped off.

I angled up to a Mex cigar stand and bought myself two packs of *Elegantes*. While I was lighting one, I glanced around. The pock-marked one wasn't in sight. The street car in which I had been transported across the mud and shallow water rattled past the cigar stand. The crowd behind me had held it up. I was on the right side for a glance at the seat my Mex friend *had* occupied. The tense is correct. He wasn't among those present.

In the rear of the cigar stand there was a bar. I went back and had some *cerveza*. It was green beer, but it was cold. The Mex didn't show. I went further back, looking for an alley. It wasn't hard to find. I turned westward, and strolled along. *El Pajaro's* place was five minutes' walk—if I'd lost my Mex. And it looked that way.

I had my back turned to the street into which the alley led—when I heard some one choking. It was the sort of a choke a human lets out when a knife slides into his back, between the ribs. I swung around—and slid my right hand into the right pocket of my light suit.

A figure came out into the alley. It was the figure of the pock-marked one—and he was sick. He emerged from the rear of a shack in the direction in which I had been headed. It looked like just another bar and beer shack.

The Mex didn't pay any attention to me. He had one hand behind his back. His knees buckled and he collapsed in the dirt of the alley. He coughed a couple more times—and then ceased to move. I got behind a pile of a half dozen kegs—and waited. Nothing happened. Five minutes passed. I went out and looked the Mex over. He was finished with riding across the Rio on the El Paso-Juarez street car. I didn't pull the knife out of his back. It had a long handle—and very probably a longer blade.

I fished in a pocket of his soiled suit and got loose an envelope. It was dirty—but there was a drawing on it. The drawing looked interesting. I shoved the envelope in my pocket—and listened to a couple of voices. They got louder. It was time to move.

Five minutes later I was sipping a beer in the *Red Rose*, and staring at the drawing on one side of the envelope. It was a pretty fair sketch of a plane—in flight. The plane was a single-seater with a round fuselage. The wings were done in red. For a couple of seconds I got the idea that the red was ink. I stuck a finger in some of the beer I didn't intend to drink—and touched the red. It had a peculiar quality. It didn't look so much like ink—and it felt different.

I paid for the beer, stuck the envelope in my pocket, and headed for *El Pajaro's* place. There was something I wanted Ben Breed to tell me. Five days had passed since the Wop had got clear, up in Bisbee. A pock-marked Mex had trailed me all over El Paso. He'd ridden across the Line with me. I'd ducked

him for a few seconds—and someone had stuck a knife in his back. That was cute—but it was the sketch on the envelope that got me. Perhaps Breed could make a guess on that. The ship looked a lot like the one the Wop had stolen from him, down in Douglas. It had a round fuselage. But it had red wings. And they hadn't been drawn with ink. Maybe Ben Breed could tell me why a Mex was trailing me, with a ship sketch in his pocket, and with the wings done in—blood!

EL PAJARO'S place looked a lot like a stable, and it smelled exactly like one. The owner of this 'dobe shack was a runt of a Mex with thick lips and his left arm absent from his squat body. He loved to whistle—and he could imitate all sorts of Mexican birds. Thus the tag. I went into the semi-darkness of the shack, blinked a few times, and headed for the back room.

There didn't seem to be anyone around. There were rough planks on the floor, and you had to take a step down to get into the little room where I was to meet Ben Breed. I took the step—but not down. My right foot touched something that was soft—and felt human. I stepped back, got my Colt out of my pocket and backed into the other room. I bent over and called out in a low tone.

"Breed!"

Silence. There wasn't even the heavy breathing of a drunk. Something was wrong. I moved up toward the little room again. I listened for several minutes. Then I struck a match, holding it at arm's length, and keeping my body to one side. I stared down at the motionless figure.

It wasn't Ben Breed. It was *El Pajaro*. There was a small, dark red spot just over his right eye. I felt his right wrist. He hadn't been dead very long. There was a rough table in the little room, and last night there had been a lamp on it. I fumbled around, found the table and the lamp. It lighted up. There wasn't much in the place to be mussed up—but the little that there was hadn't been touched. There were three chairs—not one over-turned. I looked at the table. A pack of black-papered cigarettes rested on end. Ben Breed's brand.

I shivered a bit. Then, suddenly, there was a whistle. It stiffened me—the sound of it. I'd heard *El Pajaro* whistle and this shrilling was the same thing. Crouching back of the table, I held the Colt ready for action—and waited. The whistle sounded again—then there was a lot of silence.

Then, very close, I heard breath sucked in sharply. A shape edged into the outside rim of lamp light. A tall, skinny shape—slightly stooped. Ben Breed!

He was staring down at the figure of the Mexican who had once been a good imitator of birds. He didn't bend over. His eyes were on the lighted lamp. I straightened up, spoke grimly.

"Hello, Ben! Small calibre bullet through the Bird's head. Gave me a jolt when I came in. No light—thought it was—"

I stopped. Ben Breed spoke in his husky voice. It was little more than a whisper.

"Happened ten minutes ago," he stated. "Cards Ganlin's on this side. He was trailing me. Thought I shook him off—came in here. Two greasers followed me in. I didn't like their looks, got back of the bar. Didn't know where *El Pajaro* was—so I played his stuff. Whistled, bent over back of the bar. The next thing I knew there was a crack—and the two Mex were outside. This poor devil was down—and finished."

I nodded. "Why in hell—" I muttered "—would Cards want you? If they were his men—"

Ben Breed cut in. "Didn't say they *were* his men," he stated. "I said he was on this side of the Rio, that's all."

I stared down at *El Pajaro's* body. "Someone figured you got yours," I muttered. "That whistle of yours—"

"Gave *El Pajaro* the lead meant for me!" Ben cut in, and there was bitterness in his tone. "Mac—I've got a hunch the Wop Flores is across the river."

I nodded. Reaching into my pocket, I pulled out the soiled envelope. Breed moved up to the table and the light of the lamp. His gray eyes narrowed as he saw the sketch. I told him the story.

"That red stuff isn't ink," I finished. "It's blood."

Ben Breed took a black-papered cigarette from the up-ended pack and lighted it. He looked the sketch over carefully.

"Maybe it is—maybe not," he stated. "I know a fellow across the Rio that's something of a chemist. Not that it matters much—she's my rotary-engined ship. This Mex who carried the envelope—he was trailing you. My guess is that he wanted to get this to me."

"Why?" I snapped grimly.

Breed swore. His voice was low, husky in tone. He smiled with his lips.

"Mac—" he said slowly—"the Wop and Cards Ganlin—they're fighting it to the finish. They both know how we stand. We're after the Wop. They know we're in it to the finish, too. It means a lot to you—to get Flores. It's part of my job—to keep the Border clear of his brand of human. We're in it deep, Mac—and Ganlin knows it. If he had information that would help us—he'd see that we got it. And the Wop would see that we *didn't*—"

I swore softly. "The sketch of that ship—"

Ben Breed's eyes were narrowed to little slits. He spoke tonelessly.

"That Mex trailing you—maybe he'd been told something, but not too much. Someone gave him this sketch. It's a drawing of my old ship. If my hunch is right, and the Wop's in town—he flew in!"

I nodded. "But why the red wings?" I asked slowly. "That ship of yours is painted gray—"

Ben Breed smiled grimly. "A knife in the back—for a Mex that has something that wouldn't hurt us any to look at," he breathed. "And a bullet in the head for a Mex that someone thought was me. The Wop's around, Mac. And so is Ganlin."

I shook my head slowly. "Flores has got your single-seater," I stated. "She's fast—and she mounts a Browning. All we've got is that battered D. H. two-seater, with the bracketed Lewis-gun. We've got to keep out of the air, Ben."

Breed straightened. "The Wop's licked us twice, Mac—" he said slowly—"and he got a draw the other time. We're spoiling his chances to get coin. Each time we spoil—he gets more desperate. And Cards is fighting him hard. The two greasers that got *El Pajaro*—and thought they got me—they'll give Flores the news. Ten to one they're his men. But the Wop knows his stuff—he'll want a look-see. He isn't so far away. He'll—"

"Come here!" I finished grimly. "If he does—"

Ben Breed cut in sharply. "If he does—we'll have our hands full!" he stated. "He won't blunder in. Now listen—"

He spoke slowly, expressionlessly—and I listened. From somewhere along the narrow street came the sound of a squeaky phonograph. It reminded me of the Wop—and the stuff he'd pulled in Tia Juana, with Cards Ganlin fighting him all the way. The renegade Mex had had things pretty much his way, along the Border, until Ben Breed had sat in on the game. And Cards Ganlin, himself a crook, was helping us just so long as the Wop had power—we both knew that. After the Wop went out—

Ben Breed finished speaking. He looked me in the eyes. His own gray eyes held a peculiar, cold expression.

"It's our best chance, Mac," he said slowly. "The Wop's not after money—this time. He's after—*us!*"

I stared down at the sketch of the plane, nodded.

"You're the boss, Ben," I said slowly.

"But remember this—at some point in the game, Cards Ganlin'll quit us. He's looking out for himself."

Ben Breed smiled coldly. He shoved the envelope in his pocket. The muscles of his lean, browned face relaxed.

"He won't quit us—yet!" he said slowly. "And when he *does* quit—"

Breed stopped speaking, stiffened. He leaned down, blew out the lamp. We both stood motionless, listening intently. From the outside of the 'dobe shack, softly, sounded a whistle. It was a strange whistle—like that of a bird, a parrot. I'd heard *El Pajaro* whistle that way. And Ben Breed had whistled that way. And now—a third human was doing it.

There was a grip on my arm. Ben's lips were close to my right ear. He spoke in a faint whisper.

"Quiet! Get back—of the table!"

I moved in that direction. I heard Ben draw in his breath. And then, from his lips, came another whistle. It was similar to the one we had just heard, only pitched higher. I crouched back of the table, in the semi-darkness, raised my Colt. There was a faint light near the step—and the body of *El Pajaro*. I heard footfalls—very faint. And then I heard thick tones from the lips of Ben Breed. It might have been *El Pajaro* speaking again, from the dead. The same slurring, half-lisping voice the Mexican had possessed.

"Come, Señor—it is well!"

I waited, scarcely breathing. Somehow, I sensed that it was the Wop who would enter. Antonio Flores. The footfalls had ceased. And suddenly, it crashed—once, twice, three times! Red split the gloom of the larger room. I squeezed the trigger of my forty-five. It filled the smaller room with its roar. I heard a hoarse cry from Ben Breed, heard his body batter down to the soft earth—saw the shape of it as he fell.

And from the other room there was a laugh—a terrible laugh. The Wop's laugh.

"Si, Señor—it *is* well!" he chuckled—and as my gun crashed again toward the room and a figure I did not see, the laughter died—there was the sound of running feet on the planks.

I straightened, my heart pounding furiously. Three shots—the Wop had fired—straight at Ben Breed. And Ben had crashed down to the earth of the little 'dobe shack's room.

"Damn him!" I muttered. "He played his—"

"Steady!" The voice came from the earth before me. Ben's voice, calm—sharp as a knife. "Don't go—outside!"

I was at his side. "He missed?" I muttered. "He didn't—"

I stopped asking questions. Ben Breed was up on his knees, staring at the door in the next room. He spoke in a whisper.

"I was down—under the first shot. He knew—*El Pajaro* was dead, Mac. He knew!"

I swore softly. Breed imitating the voice of a man the Wop knew could never speak again!

"How?" I whispered.

Ben Breed got to his feet. "We'll know *that*—before we get out of Juarez!" he muttered grimly. "We'll *have* to know it—to *get* out."

I stared toward the opening in the baked clay. Sounds from the main avenue drifted into the tiny room.

"You mean—" I asked slowly—"we're trapped?"

Ben Breed's reply was direct enough. His voice was very low.

"He hasn't seen me—dead!" he stated. "You turned loose lead at him. He'll stick—and he won't be alone!"

I groaned. "We waited—too long!" I muttered.

Breed was silent for a few seconds. When he spoke his voice was very low.

"No choice. If we'd gone out—it would have been the finish. They won't rush in—and we won't rush out."

I swore softly. "Ben—" I muttered—"They've got us—"

Breed gripped my left wrist. It hurt—that grip.

"Cut it!" he snapped. "Somewhere inside—the Wop's yellow! And somewhere outside—there's Cards Ganlin! We're fighting, see?"

I got control of myself. Breed took his long fingers off my wrist. He swore harshly.

"Not in a dirty shack—I *don't* get mine!" he whispered grimly. "I'll take mine in the sky—in a ship—with wings—"

I thought of the envelope in Breed's pocket, thought of the sketch.

"With—red wings!" I muttered thickly, and stared at Breed.

His gray eyes were half closed. He nodded his head slowly, smiled with tight lips.

"Better than—*this* way!" he breathed fiercely. "With red wings!"

IT was getting dark outside. Twice Mexicans had come into the shack, calling for *El Pajaro*. In neither instance had the men moved toward the back room. The bar in the larger room was small; *El Pajaro* had had no help. He made only a bare living with the *cerveza* and hot liquors; we both knew that.

We waited. Guns in our laps—we sat in the cool damp of the room—and waited. And after a long silence Ben Breed spoke. His voice was quiet, husky.

"After dark—we get clear," he said slowly. "Cards Ganlin may have lost you—when his man got knifed. We can't stay here too long."

I didn't reply. The Wop knew so many things. Ben figured that he had known *El Pajaro* was dead. And yet he had whistled—like a bird. He had almost trapped Breed. And Ben's imitation of the dead Mexican's voice had been perfect. Yes, the Wop must have known.

Ten minutes passed. Through the space between the adobe walls we could see figures pass—not many of them. Mexicans using the mean street. It was almost dark now.

Breed straightened suddenly. A shape was before the door of the shack. A man entered. He came in very slowly, turned his head toward the bar. He was tall and thin, and he kept his left hand in a pocket of his coat. He wore no hat.

A laugh sounded, somewhere out in the street. Ben Breed swore sharply. The man in the other room whirled. He went down on his knees—the hand came out of his pocket. A gun crashed. The man got to his feet. He had a gun of his own—and it crackled twice. He staggered toward the door. He was just outside when he dropped again.

His body curled in the dirt of the narrow street. From the distance came the sudden clatter of shots—higher pitched. I was on my feet.

"Steady!" Breed's voice was grim. "That's a shooting gallery—with a customer. One of the Wop's men—"

I tried to steady my nerves. "The last time—I didn't hear it—"

Ben spoke slowly. "That try for me—it wasn't in the books," he stated. "They were waiting—for this one!"

I stared out into the street. Once again my nerves were on edge. It was the waiting—the sticking in the 'dobe shack.

"The *policia*—there might be some on the main stem—" Ben's voice was low—"and the shooting at clay—that helps."

"Cards Ganlin!" I muttered. "It looked like—"

"It wasn't!" Ben snapped. "Cards wouldn't play that way. He'd look—"

He stopped speaking. The shooting gallery was in action again. From the distance we could hear the clang of the bell—when a bull's-eye was made. It sounded as though more than one customer were shooting. Ben Breed spoke sharply.

"That's funny—if the Wop—"

It beat down Ben's words—the staccato roar from the street. In a flash we were both lying flat on our stomachs—in the soft earth. And a stream of machine-gun bullets was tearing through

the narrow entrance to the shack. Baked clay spurted; splinters spouted up from the plank floor. A bullet tore into the earth less than two feet from my face. I rolled over toward Ben. He was swearing fiercely.

And then, as suddenly as it had started, the clatter of the machine-gun fire died. Voices sounded from the distance—in Mex. I wiped some dirt from my lips. Ben Breed was raising his head.

"That's the finish, Mac!" he muttered. "That racket'll attract too much attention for the Wop to—"

A few shots sounded—not the high-pitched shooting gallery cracks. They were nearer than that. Somewhere out in the street. Voices were coming closer. Breed stood up.

"The officials'll be in here—in a hurry!" he muttered. "We've got to duck, Mac. I'll go first—you follow me. I'll head for the main stem. Safer. Keep your Colt under cloth—and use your eyes!"

The street was deserted as we moved along. Breed was fifty yards ahead of me—and we kept close to the baked clay of shacks all the way, until Breed made another turn—and we were on a lighted street.

He slowed down, and I reached his side. His face seemed grayer, his eyes older—more tired. But he smiled faintly.

"Nearly got you bumped out that time, Mac," he stated. "The Wop's desperate. If you want to wing out of this thing—"

I swore. "I'm still behind, Ben," I muttered. "I owe him something. What do we do—"

Ben gripped my arm; his eyes were staring across the lighted street, toward a bar. The place was doing a big business; it was near the main street—and the Border closed at nine. El Paso folks were thirsty. But it wasn't the crowd moving both ways through the small, swinging doors that Breed was staring at. It was on a figure moving across the street toward us that his gray eyes widened, then narrowed. I drew a deep breath. The man was Cards Ganlin!

He came toward us, his gambler's face expressionless. Both hands were in sight—fingers opened. He halted before Ben.

"Thought the Wop got you!" he muttered. He had come out from the bar, but he was breathing heavily. "He got Rickers—and the Bird. He's raising hell—I cut my hand, sketched the ship—"

"Know that." Breed cut in sharply. "I got your envelope—with the ship. Someone knifed the Mex who was trailing Mac—"

"I know *that!*" Ganlin interrupted hoarsely. "Get this, Breed—the Wop's got your ship wing-painted red. There's a Federal army plane due in Juarez tonight. A Mex army officer by the name of Aguerro is flying her—a captain. It's a recruiting stunt. Her wings are red—"

Ben Breed stiffened. The crowd was surging past the three of us. I got my back to the wall, and kept my eyes opened. Ganlin was using his eyes, too.

"Why—" Ben muttered—"is the Wop flying the new paint—"

"Aguerro trailed the Wop and his outfit through Jalisco for two months, not so long ago," Ganlin cut in, speaking rapidly. "Flores was playing the bandit out in the open. Aguerro killed off half of his band—he damn near got the Wop. Flores knows that the captain's coming in. I'm not on to the game—but something's due for a break."

Breed nodded. "You're good to us, Cards," he stated in a hard voice. "Playing us against—"

"Hell!" Ganlin's tone was grim as he cut in on Breed. "The Wop's got the town loaded. I need every break—"

Breed laughed harshly. His gray eyes bored into the eyes of the gambler.

"Where's the ship?" he snapped. "My ship?"

Cards Ganlin lowered his head. He

spoke with his eyes on the broken pavement.

"Half mile west of town—just back of the Rio's mud flats—this side. She's covered with mesquite stuff—came in last night. I'm telling you—something's on—"

Breed nodded. "If he's playing for this Aguerro—"

Ganlin swore hoarsely. "More than that," he stated. "I nearly got him—while he had machine-guns up to wipe you out in *El Pajaro's* place. He's stronger than the Mex police—right now. I've given it to you straight—I'm sliding out—"

He half turned. Ben Breed chuckled hoarsely. He spoke in a steady voice.

"*Maybe* you are, Cards—don't count on me. I'm doing the same thing."

Ganlin smiled. It was a tight-lipped smile, without mirth. He spoke so that I could just catch his words.

"Half mile—back of the flats. On the straight, Breed—red wings—"

And then he was merged into the mixed crowd of Americanos and greasers, and Ben Breed was lighting a black-papered pill. I stared at it.

"Where in hell—" I muttered—"did you get *those?*"

Ben grinned. "From the table," he said grimly. "Back in the shack. When the Wop's around I don't leave anything—behind!"

THERE was a lot of excitement along the main stem. We stopped at the *Green Fan,* and Ben talked to an American bartender. I stood back of the swinging doors—and watched the crowd. There was a lot of bum music drifting around, and plenty of smells. I didn't particularly object to either—it was good to be able to listen, and breathe through my nose. Ben came up behind me.

"Big shooting over on a back street," he stated, as if he were giving me some news. "They've found two dead men—and they picked up a Mex who'd been knifed, just before the shooting. The *Jefe de Policia* is worried as hell—because one Captain Ramon Aguerro is flying into town, and there's a celebration on for him. The *Jefe* figures there's some *revolutionaires* hanging around."

I didn't say a thing. Ben lowered his voice.

"We're going back across the Rio, Mac," he said. "We're doing some air business—and in a hurry."

I stared at Ben. His eyes held a peculiar expression.

"We're going to take a crack at your ship?" I asked. "Not so good. If we wait until this Aguerro comes in—the Wop'll go after him, and we'll be sitting where—"

"I'm making a guess, Mac"—Ben was smiling—"that Captain Aguerro won't wing in to Jaurez tonight. He'd have been in by this time—unless he had engine trouble. And when he set that ship down, one of two things happened. He decided to keep her down until he got light—or the *Jefe de Policia* got word to him."

My eyes narrowed. A taxi rattled along near the curb. Breed signaled the driver. The door opened—he shoved me in, got in after me. The driver was Mex, and he had nice white teeth.

"The El Paso!" Ben told him. "Make it fast!"

The cab couldn't do that but the driver did the best he could. Traffic was heavy; the street was narrow, and there were the street cars blocking us. We had three squares to go, and then a turn to the right—and northward across the Rio. We made the three squares. I was watching the crowd when the cab turned—to the left! Not toward the river, but *away* from it!

I stiffened. Ben Breed moved his right arm. He jerked up his automatic. The window that separated us from the driver was half opened. Ben's voice sounded, sharply.

"Stop! Turn her—or I'll—"

The brakes squealed. The driver turned his head—saw the gun. He

slipped down in the seat. Ben leaned forward.

A figure swung out from the curb. The man was short, and had a dark hat pulled down over his forehead. He raised his right arm—I pulled Ben down in the seat. There was the pop-cough of a Maxim-silenced gun—once, twice. Material in the cab shivered. The driver muttered in his native language. I twisted, jerked my Colt free—

The short one with the black hat was gone. Ben shoved open the door, slid to the street. Mexicans were crowding about the cab—there was a lot of jabbering. I followed Ben out—he led the way across the street. We got into the crowd. A street car came along, slowly. Ben swung aboard. I followed him. We moved up front in the car. For the first time, Ben spoke.

"He's still in Jaurez, Mac—and he knows we're going out, now. We've got to move fast."

I nodded. Breed shook his head slowly.

"Might have known that cab driver was in the deal," he muttered. "Got him too easily—he was anxious—"

"Ben—" I interrupted grimly—"the Wop's damned anxious to have us out of the way. Something *is* on—Cards Ganlin was right."

The lean face of Breed held a tense expression. He nodded his head slowly.

"He can't afford to be wrong—not much!" Ben spoke grimly. "I was sure the Wop would play Jaurez, after the Bisbee deal. But I didn't know anything about this Aguerro angle. Cards would know—he was close to Flores once."

The street car rattled across the west bridge in the loop system. The river was dark-gray, below. Ben spoke in a steady tone.

"We'll make the field, Mac—and ride the two-seater up. That ship's worth coin to me—the single-seater. But the Wop's worth more. It was self-defense, over there. We've got to get him—before he gets us. We'll take up some of Jake's flares. If we can get down and take off the single-seater—we'll do it. If not—you do your stuff. Riddle her with the Lewis-gun. More chance of getting the Wop—with the ship out of commission."

I nodded. And then I thought about Cards Ganlin.

"Cards—" I said slowly—"he's playing in this game. He might have something to gain—if there *weren't* any red-winged ship over there back of the mud flats."

Ben Breed swore. His eyes were narrowed to little gray slits.

"Mac," he said slowly, "when you're sitting in a game with two crooks—both of 'em clever—you never can tell. But if you get a hand—you play it. Ganlin's a double-crosser—so's the Wop. Flores held the cards—across the river. He came damn close to taking all the chips. He didn't. Maybe Cards let us see his hand—*maybe* he didn't. My guess is that we hold something—and we play 'em that way."

The street car slowed down for the inspection on the American side. I drew a deep breath.

"We've *got* to hold something," I muttered harshly, "*this* time! I'm hoping it's a pair of—red wings!"

Ben was smiling coldly.

THE Mex newsboys were yelling their heads off over in El Paso. We climbed into a cab, had the driver zigzag through traffic for a few minutes—and then headed for the field. Joe Picket was watching the ship. He grinned at us.

"How's things going across the stream?" he asked. "No celebration, eh? Not with this guy Aguerro down in a crash."

We stared at him. He had a paper with a short bulletin to the effect that Captain Ramon Aguerro had crashed near a mountain town, about forty miles from Jaurez—southward. It was re-

ported that the Federal captain was badly hurt.

I climbed into the rear cockpit while Joe was jerking the blocks from the front wheels. Ben Breed got into the front cockpit, adjusted his helmet and goggles, and snapped the ignition switch. He didn't rev the engine up in a roar—but it was warming up with a low rumble as I got the canvas off the Lewis-gun and inspected it. She looked right—and I slipped on a drum. Then I pulled my helmet and goggles on. Five minutes passed. Joe stood up on a wing-step and talked to Ben. I guessed that he was asking questions—and not learning much.

Ben jerked his head. "We'll get right to our spot Mac," he called above the rumble of the engine. "After that—we'll see what happens."

I nodded, made sure that the rip-cord of my Irving 'chute was set for action, over my left thigh. The two-seater rolled out into the wind. Her rumble became a roar—we climbed off the field, got altitude. About two thousand feet of it. Then Ben winged her west of El Paso, crossing the lighted town. He banked—we roared over the Rio. Then he cut the throttle—and we started to glide.

We both saw it—at the same instant. A red trail in the sky—just off the earth below. The exhaust stream of a plane!

Ben twisted in the front cockpit. He shouted above the shrill of the wires.

"Watch him, Mac! I'm diving—to make sure—"

I nodded my head, swung the bracketed Lewis-gun. The Wop had Ben's stolen single-seater—a faster ship, with a Browning prop-synchronized. But we had altitude, and Ben could handle even as ancient a crate as the two-seater we had picked up. We came down with wires screaming. I stared over the side. And suddenly there was a white light—drifting. A flare—Ben had let loose a flare! Below it, climbing in a spiral, was a swift, red-winged single-seater!

I swore hoarsely. The single-seater was zooming up at us. Red trailed out from her nose. Above the roar of the two-seater's engine sounded the more staccato clatter of Browning fire. Ben banked our ship—I let the Lewis-gun pump lead downward, over the slanted fuselage. The Wop had been short—he let his plane fall off on a wing as the Lewis-gun bullets streamed down at him.

And then, suddenly, Ben was twisting in the front cockpit—pointing, with an arm out in the prop wash, above us. I stared upward—the sky burst into a flare of white. Shapes were plunging down. One of them came into the glare of light. A red-winged single-seater! Not the Wop's plane—she was below. Another plane!

Ben zoomed the two-seater. He waved his left arm furiously. The single-seater above was diving straight at us—red streaked down as she curved upward, holding her altitude. Another flare burst into white light. Another ship streaked down from an angle. *She* had red wings, too—and was a single-seater!

Ben let the two-seater fall off on a wing. Her nose came down. A shape flashed up from below—struts splintered out near the left wing-tip as the Wop squeezed the stick-trigger of the Browning. I shouted hoarsely.

"Wing out! He tricked—"

Ben was letting the battered two-seater spin now. She was down to a thousand feet. I stared at the left wing, wondering if it would start to warp. The two-seater came out of the spin—Ben slanted her toward the lights of El Paso. The river was below—a faintly-gleaming, winding stream of water.

Ben's head was turned toward the rear cockpit. He screamed at me as the two-seater dived.

"Aguerro — thinks we're — the Wop!"

Then his head was to the front again.

A red-winged single-seater was diving down at us. I waved my arms—but it might be the Wop. I couldn't take the chance of waiting. The bracketed Lewis-gun swung out. The red-winged ship zoomed—her tracer stream was short. As she went up a shape flashed down through the white light of two flares. I swore harshly. The fuselage was round, different from the other shapes. And a red stream traced downward—battered into the fuselage of the zooming Federal plane. There was a burst of flame. One red-winged ship twisted toward the Rio. The other roared upward, leveled off—then headed westward along the line—with two other planes in pursuit.

Ben Breed was winging the two-seater northward now. He was across the river—heading back of El Paso. The city was to the east of our course. I looked at the shattered strut. We were down within a few hundred feet of the earth. Ben turned his head. He cut down the engine speed.

"We'll land—away from El Paso—there'll be hell to pay—"

I nodded, twisted my head to the westward. I could see the exhaust streams of three ships. And I could see that the one furthest west was gaining rapidly on the other two. I spoke thickly to myself, through oil-stained lips.

"Once again—the Wop's getting clear!"

THE two-seater rested on a level stretch. Scattered mesquite dotted the spot where we had come down. There were no ranch lights in sight—we were perhaps fifty miles northwest of El Paso and Jaurez. Ben and I sat with our backs propped up against the tail assembly of the two-seater. It was Ben who spoke.

"Aguerro never did crash in Mexico, Mac," he stated grimly. "He had word that the Wop was in town. He was coming in to get him. The Federal Government want him—and want him badly. Aguerro was trying to trick him. But he didn't know that the Wop had red wings. And Flores must have figured that Aguerro would try the very stunt he did. He was flying a ship painted like the Federal planes—and they were after *us*—after our *white* wings. That is—they were until the Wop shot down one of their pilots. It might have been Aguerro—more likely it wasn't. Flores' a tough one, Mac. He's a fighting Wop!"

I smiled grimly. "He *might* have figured that we'd come after him," I muttered. "Cards gave us that tip—it wasn't so good. Supposing he's sitting in with—"

I stopped. Ben Breed closed his gray eyes, laughed harshly. He spoke in his husky tone.

"They're *both* crooks, Mac," he stated. "There'll be a fuss over this thing. We'll stay in the clear. The Wop'll stay in the clear—for a week or so. Those ships can't catch that plane of mine. He didn't get coin on this deal. He was trying for a kill. He's *got* to have coin."

I nodded. My lips moved slowly. I was pretty tired, let down.

"Can we *stop* him from getting it, Ben?" I asked in a low tone.

Ben Breed opened his gray eyes. They glinted in the first light of a rising moon. He spoke in a steady voice.

"If we *don't*, Mac," he stated grimly, "just one other thing will happen. He'll stop *us* from stopping *him!*"

GHOST GUNS by Raoul F. Whitfield

The most thrilling adventure so far of the Federal man and Mac in their duel with the Border gang.

IN OCTOBER BLACK MASK

The Devil's Deputy

By ERLE STANLEY GARDNER

Black Barr meets up with the "devil's deputy."

FATE stood at the forks of the trail.

At least that is the only way by which I can explain why I took the turn to the left when the choice of either directions meant nothing to me.

For a mile we followed the left-hand trail, my black and myself, swinging forward at a fast trail-walk, the high chaparral shutting out all but occasional glimpses of the view. We were working down the side of a long ridge, approaching a valley. The main trail from which I had turned, kept to the summit and went on. This left-hand fork was headed toward a plateau-like valley, where it probably ended.

A white signboard hung at an angle from a small tree, fastened by a rusty nail, bleached by sun and wind, cracked and checked, and yet it still bore its message *"Caliente Flats 10 M."* It was a sign such as is used by the Forestry Service to mark mountain fire trails. Yet the printing was not that of a government stencil. It was crude hand-lettering.

Another mile and a rider approached, coming up the trail, pressing his horse.

I stopped, swung to one side, and waited, hands ready, poised over my pistols. In the mountains of the West, particularly in those communities where the main means of communication are over horseback trails, it is well to be prepared for trouble when one meets another on the trail

He saw me, scowled, averted his glance and passed in sullen silence. That, of itself, was unusual. The code of the West calls for a brief exchange of courtesies when two riders meet. More, there was a blood-stained bandage on his shoulder, and the blood was a bright scarlet, not the rusty red of dried blood. The man had been wounded, and the wound was bleeding even as he urged his mount up that trail, away from Caliente Flats.

I shrugged my shoulders and rode on.

Then I came to other signs, signs announcing that the trail was closed by landslides, signs which gave detours up bare mountain sides, signs which were all in the crude lettering of uneducated hands. And past all these signs, straight down the trail, led the tracks of the horseman I had met.

I followed those tracks, followed them until I came within sight of a group of rough buildings huddled together at the head of a little valley. On the sides of the mountains which rimmed the valley showed the great scars of mining operations, the white piles of rock at the ore dumps. The setting sun glinted from galvanized iron roofs, shone redly on board shacks, cast long shadows from grazing cattle, showed a long line of rutted roadway running to the north, a roadway which would probably connect with the railroad.

The sun swung behind the mountains to the west; a chill of the high places swept subtly through the still air. Darkness came, and lights began to glow from the clump of buildings.

A ride up and down the main street of the town told me all that I needed to know.

There was no hotel, but one restaurant worthy of being called such, and any number of pool-halls, card-rooms, dance-halls and saloons. There are hundreds of such places scattered through the West, places where prohibition simply has not penetrated because the people do not wish it. Mining communities out in the desert, in the heart of the mountains, are a law unto themselves. Delving underground is a cheerless business, and men who work in the mines must have such enjoyment as the body craves if they are to be held in camps out in the wilds, out where there is none of the diversions of civilization.

I left my horse before the entrance of the restaurant and entered. It was a rather pretentious place for a mining camp feeding house. There was a long counter, a row of oilcloth covered tables, and then a doorway leading to a corridor, from which opened booths. The lumber was all home made, cut from slabs of the sugar pines which grew on the high mountains to the west.

Several men sat at the counter, and one or two were sprawled over the tables. They were a hard looking lot, men who wolfed their food with shoulders hunched forward, knife and fork in constant motion, eyes fixed vacantly ahead, jaws working rapidly.

I sat at a table and looked past the line of oil lamps to the murky mystery of the corridor where were located the booths; booths from which came an occasional shrill of feminine laughter.

A Chinaman came shuffling through the curtained doorway. His beady eyes glanced about the place, spotted me as a newcomer, and he made his way toward me with a heavy tumbler filled with water, a knife and fork.

"H'lo. You likum eat?"

There was a steady impassivity about his stare, an impersonal something in his tone which seemed a mask, more of a mask than the Oriental habitually wears.

I gave him my order and he shuffled away.

A silence had fallen on the place, an ominous, tense silence. The men at the counter had quit chewing their food, had laid knife and fork to one side and were half turned, watching over their shoulders. The men at the other tables had somehow tensed, and one who had his back toward me seemed to have worked his feet under him, preparatory to a swift jump.

The Chink was engaged in flopping my steak on the greasy stove top, crooning some weird Chinese song to himself.

And then it happened.

The man, who had his back turned, flung out of his chair and abruptly faced me, his face working with some strong emotion. I had been ready, and my own hand held the butt of a forty-five,

concealed beneath the table, the muzzle pointed on a line with his heart.

When he saw me, his face relaxed somewhat and his eyes narrowed. In that split second before I had registered on his mind, when he had nothing by which to identify me but the sound of my voice, I had sensed the emotion which gripped him. It had been a half fear, half hate.

As it was, his face became drawn, determined. He let his hand drop from the handle of his revolver, and strode purposefully to my table.

"Just got in the valley, eh?" he greeted.

"I have already given my order," I said.

He was a big, burly individual, one who had played hard at the game of life, plunged over his head with Devil's stakes, and was continuing the game at headlong pace. He was a creature of fierce emotions, an animal cunning being the only indication of intelligence on his face—a face that was scarred and seamed, warped by evil emotions. Cruelty and cowardice showed in the line of his quivering mouth, but his hands were steady.

"Ordér, hell! I ain't runnin' this joint. Are yuh lookin' for work?"

"If I am I shall find it."

His hand dropped again.

"Well, you needn't be so damned fresh. Get this an' get it straight. Yuh ain't goin' to like it here. It's a powerful unhealthy climate for strangers, an' we don't want 'em around. Our graveyard ain't big enough."

"The climate and I will get along," I said; "but I am sorry about your graveyard being so small. Perhaps it will be even more crowded when *I* leave."

He sucked in his breath in a great gasp. I could see in his eyes the determination to reach for his guns, to have it out—and then he stiffened, tensed. His eyes had caught the significance of my hand which was under the table.

"I was just warnin' yuh," he said in a voice that had suddenly changed its tone. His eyes squirmed about, his mouth twitched and beads of perspiration came on his forehead. Slowly, he walked away, never turning his back to me, his fascinated eyes on the table cloth which masked the gun, the fingers of his hands working.

Arrived at his table he sighed and sat down.

The men at the counter turned again to their food. The other diners clattered knife and fork. Life in the restaurant returned to normal—and then my ears caught the note of the Chinaman's song. It had subtly changed from the weird undulations of Chinese music, such as a mother might croon to an infant, and contained a subtle note of triumph.

A few minutes more and he seemed to catch himself, looked sheepishly about him, lowered his voice, scooped up some potatoes, spread them on the hot platter, flopped on the steak and came shuffling along the board floor, his beady eyes darting over my face as though they would cover the minutest detail of my every feature. The face, itself, however, was an impassive mask of yellow skin.

He set down the food, then took his way once more through the curtained doorway.

In a few moments he returned, glanced sharply at me once again, then came to my table, stooped, picked up my plate, swept knife and fork into his yellow talons, gathered bread, butter and water into his crooked arm, and started slowly toward the curtain.

"You eatum in here," he said over his shoulder.

For the moment I was on the point of jerking him back by the slack of his blouse, and then, for the second time that day, I yielded to an inexplicable whim.

I followed him through the heavy, grimy curtain, into the dim hallway, past a few booths, and into a little

compartment where, without another word, he spread out my food on the table.

It is as useless to puzzle over the ways of a Chinaman as it is to argue with the universe. The average man thinks of eternity as of something distant, to come into existence on his death. A Chinaman thinks of eternity as being present. He lives in cycles, lives in eons, and, once having made up his mind, becomes impervious to argument.

I resumed my eating, saying no word. If words would do no good I would not waste them. But one thing I had determined. No curtain would be drawn across that booth, no concealment behind which a man might come down the dim corridor and shoot me from ambush.

As though divining my thought, the Chinaman threw back the curtain over the top of the booth, leaving the doorway open . . . and then I caught sight of the occupant of the opposite booth, caught the curve of her shoulder, the delicate line of her stocking. The rest was hidden by the curtain which dropped over the doorway.

I scooped up some greasy potatoes and cut at the steak, saw the curve of the shoulder heave, and caught the sound of a stifled sob. The woman was crying, crying not with the gentle helplessness which is the weapon of the sex, the last resort in times of stress, but crying with anger, a fierce, choking anger which was impotent.

I sat up, interested.

Shuffling steps again.

The Chink came with a cup of coffee, and his eyes intercepted mine as I stared with frank curiosity at the next booth. Ordinarily the eyes of a Chinaman are inexpressive, darting, furtive, subtle. Now, however, there came the swift gleam of an expression. He set down the coffee and hurried away, and there could be no doubting the triumph of his weird crooning, a fierce triumph which might have been a hymn of thanks to some war god.

From the booth opposite I heard the swift crumple of paper, a wadded note was thrust beneath the delicate, high arched foot, and the shoe stamped down again and again. Then the curtain swept back and she saw me for the first time.

Her face was flushed, the cheeks stained with tears, but there was none of the washed-out look in her eyes. Rather they glowed with a fierce intensity, and about her mouth was a look of determination. Her eyes were weeping, but her mouth was indomitable as Gibraltar.

She saw me, caught the glance of my eyes, and her lip curled a trifle. Then she was gone, sweeping down the dim corridor with the carriage of a queen. Not like other women was she. There had been no effort to conceal her tears, no attempt to soften the ravages of crying by powder and rouge, but she faced the world defiantly, the tears streaming down her face, her mouth set in rage.

She was perhaps twenty-two or three, a girl who had blossomed into woman's estate, rather small of bone, delicate of figure, yet firm of mouth and steady of eye, and there was a something in the poise of her head which spoke of self-reliance.

I glanced at the table in the opposite booth. A dinner had been brought, served with a delicacy of fancy dishes such as hardly seemed possible in this rude camp. Yet the dinner had not been touched. There was a small tenderloin steak, planked, ornamental potatoes bordering it. Radishes had been cut into delicate petaled roses. Deliciously browned biscuits sat in a little individual pan. That dinner was not one that might be selected from the bill of fare in this Chinese restaurant. The preparation of that meal had been a work of love, not a commercial enterprise.

Upon the floor of the restaurant there lay the crumpled paper which had been stamped beneath her foot; and down

the corridor came the shuffle-slip, slip-shuffle, slap-slap, of the straw slippers of the Chinaman.

"You likum pie. All light. I bling um one piecee pie."

A wedge of restaurant pie was set before me, and the Chinaman turned to the other table. As he saw the untouched food he made queer, guttural sounds, and then, for a moment, his voice rose in some Cantonese exclamation of wrath, but soon he calmed down and began stolidly to remove the dishes.

At length the table was cleared, but the paper still remained crumpled on the floor. Also I had a peculiar sensation of dark, beady eyes glittering down the corridor, fastened on that crumpled sheet. Fool! Did he think that I would lean across the aisle and pick up that paper?

He waited while I finished my pie, and then came slippety-slapping along the rough boards.

"You likum check? Me catchum paper makum check."

There followed a search through the folds of his blouse.

"No catchum paper . . . All light. Me catchum."

With the words he stooped as swiftly and accurately as the swoop of a hawk, and clutched the crumpled paper in his yellow talons, smoothed it out, spread it on my table, and scrawled the figure fifty on the back.

"All light. You pay um flifty cents you come cashier's desk," he sing-songed and was gone, this time pulling the cloth curtain over the entrance to the door. Beyond doubt he intended that I should read that paper.

I turned it over.

The words were scrawled rather than written, scrawled in indelible pencil, and there were purple blotches where tears had fallen on the penciled lines. However, it could still be easily deciphered.

"Your uncle is gone. You will be next. Beat it quick. U-No-Hoo."

At the end of the counter I looked for the cashier. There was none, not even a cash register. The Oriental shuffled down the bar and held me with his beady eyes.

"You pay um flifty cents. You come back bleakfast?"

I threw him a half dollar and shrugged my shoulders by way of answer, then strolled to my black, took a nose-bag from the saddle and gave him his grain. He had come far that day, and there was a strange feeling in the depths of my mind that he might have to go further that night.

The lights of a card-room blazed forth whitely into the night. The place was lit with a gasoline lantern, and the windows showed startlingly brilliant against the black of the night. I wandered aimlessly within, found a vacant chair at a draw poker game, and purchased a stack of chips.

The play was slow, and I was paying more attention to the men in the room than to the cards. I did not play to win, and I did not intend to lose. As a result I made many antes but few draws, looking, listening, thinking.

And then, suddenly, I caught my own name. It was in the middle of a sentence, and it came from behind me, where some man was leaning against the bar, drinking the deadly white mule and discoursing with a friend.

" . . . Black Barr; yeah, sure I know him. I throwed down on him once near Yuma, an' he was a good dog with me ever after. Yeah, he may be quick, but he ain't so all-fired quick as yuh hear about. I gave him an' even break, an' I had him covered before his own guns were half way out.

"What'd he do? He just histed his hands for the sky an' grinned at me—not that deadly grin he gets when he's killin', but a sorta friendly, sociable grin. 'You win,' he says, an' he says it so blame sociable an' friendly like that I didn't have the guts to pull the trigger.

"Yeah, he looks just like the way they describe him. He's got black hair an' eyes, an' there's a sombre somethin'

about his face. He wears a black hat an' coat, an' black angora chaps. When he's gettin' mad is the time to recognize him, though. Then his mouth commences to crawl an' squirm over his face like a rattlesnake twistin' around through a clump o' cactus."

Casually, I turned and surveyed the speaker. He was a loud-mouthed killer. One of the second-rate gunmen who circulate around wherever trouble is to be had, selling their services as paid murderers, enhancing their reputations by bar-room bragging. Yellow to the core, they shoot from ambush or when they have all the advantage, and seek to terrify honest cattlemen by tales of their exploits. I knew the type, but the man I had never seen before.

I shrugged my shoulders and fixed my attention on the card game. I am not a killer, although I have often killed; and therein is a vast difference.

I looked at my cards, and saw three queens. A player across the board pulled out a roll of bills. "I'm declarin' these in the game," he said before picking up his cards. "Any other player can do the same."

I glanced casually at the faces of the men. Without exception my fellow players were looking at me. Evidently a deal had been framed up. I would be given four queens after the draw, and my opponent would have the hand beaten, the others dropping out after the betting was well under way. It was an old trap, but I would pretend to walk in it, would declare in a roll of bills and then throw the four queens into the discard with the money still in front of me. There is nothing which causes more irritation to a professional gambler who is trying to catch a "live one."

I pulled out my own roll.

"This is in," I said shortly. "Give me two cards."

The other man drew two cards. The remaining players made various draws. I looked at my two cards, a queen and a ten. Four queens, and there was a subtle tension around the table.

"Betting fifty," announced the man across from me, as he slid a stack of chips into the center of the table.

"Here, stranger, yuh dropped a paper."

The voice came from behind me, and was the voice of the bragging killer who had boasted of getting the drop on Black Barr.

I looked over my shoulder.

The paper he had picked up was the paper I had secured in the restaurant, the tear-stained threat which the girl had trampled on, and he was holding it in such a way that the folded paper was slowly opening.

"Ah yes, thanks," I said, reaching out my hand.

The fold straightened. The paper lay spread out before the gaze of all present, and the man who was holding it out jumped back with an oath.

"Hey, you, how did you get this?"

I disdained to answer the question, but reached out my hand.

The other jerked his own hand back, his eyes narrowing, his lips twitching.

"Havin' this is just like havin' a death warrant!" he snarled, his hands hovering around the butts of his guns, ready to drop the paper, and reach for his weapons.

I knew the type. He would get into action while I was getting up from my chair. His kind didn't believe in giving an even break. Safety first was his motto. Particularly when it came to a killing.

I glanced over the table.

Cold hostility was written upon the faces of the men who were about the green cloth. Evidently I had become unpopular. The man who was sitting across the table had lowered his cards slightly—sufficiently for me to see the corners of four kings.

That was the last straw.

I swept my hands to my guns even as I leapt from the chair. The cheap killer did as I anticipated. He had

dropped the note and had started for his weapons as soon as he saw me start to get back from the table. Ordinarily a man would have got to his feet, and then started things. Then the killer would have had the advantage. As it was, I was having almost an even break with him.

Never had I been in better form. Never had my hands worked with smoother rhythm. My guns were out before the other's hands had started from his holsters, and, suddenly, it flashed through my mind that here would be a good chance to show him in his true colors. I did not fire, but thrust the weapons into the pit of his stomach.

So wide a margin did I have on him at the draw that he had time to appreciate it, to take stock of the situation. His hands paused, the guns half out from his holsters, and his bulging eyes fastened on my face.

My mouth was writhing, twisting into that deadly smile which has made the name of Black Barr known from one end of the Border to the other, all over the West, wherever men of the outdoors gather about camp fires or carry braided ropes coiled on their saddles.

"BLACK BARR!" he yelled, his face turning a sickly yellow with sheer terror.

And then the lights went out.

How it had been arranged I do not know, probably by some clever arrangement for just such a purpose, as ordinarily a lantern of this sort is not quickly extinguished. At any rate the room plunged into darkness with no stage of transition, no slight afterglow. One moment I was standing there, weapons drawn, the yammering coward before me, slavering at the thought of death. The next instant and all was dark, and I had thrown myself forward.

Guns blazed in the dark, shots which came from the location of the card table. Bullets thudded into the wood of the bar over my head. But there were no flashes of light from where stood the man who had picked up the letter. He had learned his lesson.

As for the others—I had no quarrel with them other than the holding of those cards, four queens which would have been out against four kings. And then there was the matter of those flashing guns which had been directed toward the place where I had been standing when the lights went out. That matter could wait.

I rolled over, crawled under the card table, made for a corner of the room, ran into a mass of huddled humanity —non-combatants who were crowding away from the flying lead—felt a welcome breeze coming through an open side door, stepped out into the night, through a cluttered yard, into a narrow alley down to the street and up to my horse.

When the lights should again be turned on and the men look for the riddled body of Black Barr they would have a shock. I would have vanished into the night without so much as a trace behind. I had not fired a shot, had said no word. When there had been no answering flashes from my guns they would have felt certain I was dead. Their feelings when the lights came on could be readily imagined. Black Barr has a reputation, and these men who had sought to kill him would not be resting very easy, knowing that he was out in the night, a constant menace.

The black had finished his grain, and had worked off the nose-bag, a trick of his, and stood regarding me with distended nostrils. He had heard the shooting and was wondering whether there would be the smell of blood in his delicate nose. I quieted him with a word, swung into the saddle and loped off into the night.

I usually sleep alone under the stars. Not for one who has a price on his head, who is the quarry of every gunman who shoots from ambush, can

there be the luxury of a hotel bed. Too many gunmen would like to have the honor of having dispatched the notorious Black Barr.

I rode several miles away from the town. Of a sudden men had become obnoxious to me. I wanted the quiet of the night, the swinging stars, the noises of the desert, the rustling of sage, the whispering of drifting sand.

I unsaddled, turned the black loose where there seemed to be some feed, rolled out my blankets, and drifted off into warm drowsiness, lulled by the hushed noises of the outdoors, a great peace descending upon me.

It was some time later, how much later I had no means of knowing, that flooding consciousness came back to my brain. My mind was weary, my body warm and resting, and my senses rebelled against being awakened, but some mysterious force snapped open my eyes, and when the red blotch on the horizon registered upon my brain I sat upright, all thought of sleep gone from me.

It was a fire, not the scattered, diffused radiance of a brush fire, but the ugly, sullen glow of a house. Above the glow there showed a writhing, twisting column of smoke, smoke which twisted this way, writhed that, puffed up into great billows, then spread out into scattered wisps.

Somewhere over the little ridge which lay to the south, not over two miles from where I was laying, a house was going up in smoke.

I kicked out of my light blanket and whistled for my black. Out in the darkness he whinnied his response, waited for a second whistle, and then came cantering up, surprised at a start in the dead of night, but holding steady, nevertheless, while I threw the saddle blankets and cold saddle on his back. A few moments more and I was ready to travel; but, just as I swung into the saddle, I heard the thud-thud-thud of many hoofs, horses proceeding at a rapid pace, bunched, compact.

I ducked low in the saddle, insured the silence of my horse by a word, and waited.

Out of the darkness there came a vague, floating shadow, and then, for a brief instant, there showed against the red glare on the horizon some ten horsemen, riding in close formation. A moment only and then they were gone. For several seconds the sound of the horses came to my ears, and then that, too, faded away. Silence once more on the floor of the valley, a silence that was rimmed with mighty mountains and blazing stars. The glare over the ridge deepened. A tongue of flame writhed and twisted up in the smoke.

I turned the horse and we went at a swift gallop. As I rode, I thought of the dark mystery of the shadowy horsemen. During all of the time I had been able to hear them there had been no word spoken. The men had no elation over the outcome of their errand, had such a perfect understanding that words were idle. They had merely floated through the night like a black cloud gliding silently over the trackless heavens.

Once over the top of the ridge and I could see that both a house and barn were burning. They were within half a mile, and I pressed the black forward, but, even as I rode, I could see that it was too late to save anything from the flames.

A figure that seemed surrounded by a filmy halo dashed back and forth before the fire, and, as I rode closer, I could see that it was the figure of a girl, that the filmy halo was the diaphanous transparency of some thin night attire which floated about her in light folds. Her activity puzzled me. She was not attempting to save anything from the blazing inferno, but rather she seemed to be executing some strange dance, some weird incantation before the burning buildings, using them as a ceremonial fire about which she leapt.

The firelight outlined her shapely limbs, seemed to gild them with flickering flame, turned to ruddy gold the flowing locks of her hair, the fluttering silk of the night-dress. I could not make out the dance. It was like the dance of an Indian ceremonial, rhythmic, elemental, unmeasured, yet graceful, purposeful.

My black thundered on. The distance was shortened to yards, to feet. The girl turned, and I recognized the features of the girl I had seen in the restaurant.

And then suddenly she paused, stooped, and whirled with elbows elevated. For a moment I could not understand the posture, and then I flung myself sideways. She was aiming a rifle directly at me, and the raised elbows of the silhouette was all that the firelight showed me.

There was a flash, the whisper of a bullet as it skimmed through the air, the rapid motion of the girl's arms as another shell was thrown into the gun.

"I am a friend!" I shouted.

The words served only to give her a more accurate conception of my whereabouts for her next shot. There was a flash, and the whipping impact of a bullet in my hat brim.

Bending low over the saddle, I swung out in a series of zigzags, and from the darkness somewhere to my right came the mocking sound of a taunting laugh, a laugh that was the laugh of a man. The girl, too, heard the laugh, for she shifted her position, the firelight glittered redly along the barrel of the rifle, and two shots crashed out in the direction of the laugh.

After that there was silence.

I went over the top of the ridge before I again unsaddled, stretched out my blanket and rolled within it. A moment more and I was asleep with the black crunching the short grass nearby. If our help was not wanted it would not be given. I had offered the girl assistance. My answer had been the deadly whisper of a bullet, the crash of a rifle. She could dance around the fire until doomsday so far as I was concerned.

I awoke in the soft hush which comes before dawn, when there is the faintest whisper of a mysterious wind sweeping over the plain, when the colors in the east run from brassy green to bright orange.

By sunup I was in the saddle, headed toward Caliente Flats, and, as I rode, I loosed my guns in their holsters. The action was purely instinctive, prompted perhaps by a subconscious recollection of the mysterious riders, the flaming building, the mocking laugh from the darkness.

I breakfasted in the restaurant of the Chinese.

He watched me enter with calm impassivity, but, when I would have seated myself at the counter, he crooked his finger and shuffled into the corridor leading to the booths.

I followed him.

"What's your name?" I asked.

"Wing Lee."

"Why you put me here?"

"Bling you bleakfast," he said, and shuffled away.

A few minutes and he was back with oatmeal and coffee. I resumed the conversation.

"Why you no let me eat outside, Wing Lee? What for you bring me back here?"

The interrogation was couched in the pidgin-English which is the accepted method of communication with his kind, but he blinked his eyes vacantly.

"No sabbe," he remarked. "I go bling ham 'n eggs. You likum ham 'n eggs?"

There is no use wasting breath on a Chinaman who holds his tongue, or resorts to the "no sabbe" game. When he brought the ham and eggs I remained silent, as though the matter were closed.

He hesitated, sucked in his breath as though to speak, and then slippety-slapped away.

Five minutes later and I heard his

voice, crooning away a steady stream of sing-song English. It was as though he was talking to a horse he was trying to catch, seeking to distract its attention from the cold-bitted bridle.

"You no eatum out there. Him no good. I catchum you one piecee room. You eatum no catchum bothered. Me, I smart man, I heap sabbe. You likum eatum where nobody 'round. You come me, I fixum. I catchum ham 'n eggs. You heap likum nice flesh egg?"

Keeping up his perpetual wheedling conversation, he came shuffling along the rough boards leading some bulky figure to the adjoining booth.

Habit which has taught me to trust no man, made me shift my eyes from the Chinaman to the figure which followed, and then I instantly stiffened. It was the cheap killer of the pool-hall; the man who had boasted of having had the drop on Black Barr, who had picked up the crumpled piece of paper which had fallen from my pocket.

"Look here, John, ..." he was saying, using the conventional name by which all Chinese are known in the mining and cattle camps of the West. "You likee make piecum money? You likee shagum powder one cup coffee make one hundred dollars? You sabbe big man, black hat, black shirt, black horse, black guns . . ."

The Chinaman moved to one side, moved just far enough so that there was no obstruction to my view, so that the other man could see me.

"No-o-o-o sabbe," he intoned.

The man across the way caught the glitter of my eyes, realized that his conversation had been overheard, knew that the time for a showdown had come.

He thought quickly, that man. His hand did not swoop immediately to his guns, but paused long enough to flip the glass of water which was on the table in front of him, straight at my face. Then his hands went for his guns with all the speed they could command.

The shot from my right gun caught the hurtling water glass, smashed it in the air, into a thousand pieces. My second shot crashed though the forehead of the would-be poisoner.

There was the silent flitting of a shadow and the Chinaman was at my elbow.

"You come this way, quick!" he hissed.

I followed him, my hand on my gun, ready for a shot at the first sign of treachery.

"You climb out window," he said in his sing-song voice. "You come in flont door, you eatum one more bleakfast. I say him first time you come this morning."

There was much wisdom in what Wing Lee said, and but little time for meditation upon that wisdom or the reason back of it. Already, feet were rushing down the boards of the corridor; already men mere piling in through the entrance of the restaurant.

I dived through the window, bent double, ran to the corner of the building, waited for a moment, and sauntered quietly and unobserved into the crowd which was packing the doorway.

A moment more and I had forced my way through, and sauntered to one of the oilcloth covered tables.

"What's all the excitement, John?" I asked, casually.

Several pairs of eyes turned at the sound of my voice.

"Somebody shootum," remarked the Chinaman placidly as he drew a cup of coffee with a hand that was as steady as a graven image. "You likum bleakfast? Catchum nice flesh egg. You likum ploached egg?"

I nodded.

From the corridor came the awkward shuffle of many feet, and the body of the killer was borne past, borne by men who were cursing, masking their terror by rough talk.

"The back door's locked," said one. "Must've shot him through a window," opined another. "Wing Lee says he was the only one back in the booth."

I remembered that the restaurant had

been deserted when I entered, and chuckled, but the chuckle was short lived. My thought turned to the Chinaman. Had he heard of the trouble the night before? Why had he escorted me to the booth? Why had he brought the killer to the other booth? Why had he so nimbly skipped to one side just before the shooting commenced? Was he friend or foe—and who was the girl who had occupied that same booth the night before?

That Chink was playing a deep game, and he would bear watching.

However, his ruse worked, and no one thought of connecting me with the shooting. I nibbled through my second breakfast, and then strolled to my horse. A piece of paper dangled from the saddlehorn, and a closer inspection showed that it was an envelope, twisting and spinning at the end of a string.

With narrowed, watchful eyes, I tore open the envelope and read the message within.

"Come to the Half Box Ranch at once," it said, and it was unsigned. There was a hundred dollar bank note accompanying the missive.

I could see no one taking an undue interest in my movements. There were people on the street, loungers in front of the restaurant, still talking of the shooting, an occasional horseman going past, a few men grouped before one of the combination saloons and pool-halls, but no one that I could spot as being particularly interested in me. However, I had no doubt but what there was a hidden pair of eyes watching to see how I took the message.

I twisted the bill and the note up into a spiral, touched a match to both and used them to light the end of a cigar. Black Barr did not accept orders, even when they were accompanied with bank notes. Whoever had delivered his letter could have his answer in my actions.

Two minutes later and a big, burly figure elbowed its way from the pool-hall, and heaved into a saddle which was on the back of a spirited horse that had been tied to the hitching rack, and loped to the edge of the town, then struck into a gallop and vanished into the heat haze in a cloud of dust.

I recognized him as the man who had approached me in the restaurant, the man with the crafty eyes, the one who had warned me of the climate and the small graveyard.

I fancied that I knew where he was going, fancied that I could tell the report he was taking with him.

I spent an hour mingling with the men of Caliente Flats, joining the crowds of gossips, taking a great delight in the way conversation languished whenever I came within earshot, noticing the way men found occasion to leave a group as soon as I joined it. They were, then, talking about me. More than that, I was considered a dangerous companion. Men did not want to be seen talking with me, did not wish to appear intimate. I was an outcast, a marked man. I might have been carrying the plague and still have been made more welcome.

I grinned to myself. That would mean a quick showdown. There were events impending, and their coming was presaged in the very atmosphere of the place.

I determined to ride out to the scene of the fire. I owned a curiosity concerning the girl who stamped on threatening letters and who executed a war dance in the light of burning buildings. I went for my horse and the animal was gone, had been led away.

I knew he had been led away because he would permit no one but me to ride him; knew that it had taken main force to drag him from the place where he awaited the return of his master. A cold rage swept me. My mouth began its strange writhing. Whoever it was who had taken that horse would hear from me, and that soon. A wanderer makes but few friends. My horse was my companion, my only close friend.

A flicker of white caught my eye.

Another of those envelopes had been fastened to the hitching rack near where my black had stood.

I ripped it open.

"Black Barr. Your horse is at the Half Box."

The message was unsigned.

I looked about. Nearby was the animal I had earlier seen the burly individual mount and on which he had recently returned. He was lathered from a long gallop, but still had plenty of strength and wind. I became conscious of the eyes of the loungers fastened upon me. Without appreciable hesitation I picked up the reins of the lathered mount.

"Hey, what yuh doin' with that bronc?"

It was the voice of the heavy, burly fellow with the cunning eyes.

"I'm just taking him as a guide," I said. "I want to find the Half Box ranch and I want to find it in a hurry."

He disclosed a long row of yellow, fanglike teeth.

"Give'm his head an' he'll show it to yuh."

The words were all I needed to connect up the information I had with the surmises I conjectured. He and I would have an accounting, this man with the fanglike teeth and the cunning eyes; but that could wait.

The horse set his own pace and took his own trail. He was a splendid animal. Too good an animal for the ordinary cowhand to ride. Whoever that fellow was, he held some important position; foreman perhaps, perhaps manager.

It was twenty minutes to the Half Box. I spotted the brand on some pastured cattle, and the horse turned in at a rutted road, into a yard where buildings, low, unpainted, ugly, squatted about in a rude half square. There was a bunkhouse, a stable, a harness house, blacksmith shop, and a big, rambling ranch-house with broad verandas. My black was in the yard, tied snugly to a post, and he whinnied his welcome.

I untied him, then strode to the ranch-house.

A cowpuncher came to the door, a gun on either hip, a broad smile on his face, and jerked his thumb to a side door.

"You'll find 'm in there."

I went through the side door, and my hands swung low as I entered the spacious room.

A figure was seated before a desk, a figure that was almost unbelievably fat. Fat seemed to ooze through his skin, to collect in greasy globules on his forehead, to have formed in a rancid coating over the hairy hands. His thick, sensuous lips were wreathed in a smile and his eye glittered with hoggish self satisfaction.

"Black Barr, I believe," and his voice was thin, piping, high like the squeal of a pig when he first plants his forefeet in a food trough. "I had to get you out here some way. I can't ride, and I wanted to talk with you."

On either side of him was a bodyguard, and he needed it. Thin, ratlike individuals they were, with shifty glances and hands that rested on their belts.

"Black Barr I need you. My enemies, the Flying M, are on the warpath, my men are being killed and my homesteads are being burned."

I glared at him.

"When you want to talk with me after this use a long distance telephone. Don't ever let anyone lay hands on my horse again. You hear?"

The piggish eyes glittered again. This time a steely glitter. His hands were folded upon his huge stomach, and there was nothing that moved about him except the lids of his eyes, but somehow he contrived to give an impression of deadly menace, like a fat spider, sitting in its web, waiting for the fly to entangle itself a trifle deeper.

"My name is Ed Boswell," he piped, in his thin voice, "and you'll hear more of it if you stay hereabouts. I do what I want to do, and what I can't do my-

self I have others do for me. I'm not used to being threatened."

I laughed.

"Was it *your* homestead that burned last night?"

His small eyes searched my face, and he shifted slightly. The muscles moved under the great layer of fat, but the body gave only a shimmying shiver.

"It was my homestead, although the Flying M claim it, and although a girl claims it."

"Who built the buildings?"

Another shimmy that would be a squirm, and the pale tongue flecked the heavy lips.

"The girl's uncle built 'em, but they were built on my land."

I turned.

"Next time you have anything to say to me write me a note."

My eyes were on the two guards. Would they go into action?

"You burnt up one note," he complained.

"And I intend to burn up the rest," I said, and slammed the door.

"Ten thousand dollars," he piped after me. "Ten thousand dollars for possession of that homestead for thirty days."

Abruptly, I turned and came back I could see that he thought the money tempted me and an oily smile smirked over his flabby face. He had opened a drawer, and his thick fingers were plucking forth one hundred dollar bank notes, stacking them up before my eyes.

"There was one thing I overlooked telling you," I said. "I'm getting tired of someone around here. If it's you, this is your warning."

His eyes grew vacant, puzzled.

I slammed the door, this time for good. He had had his warning. The future was up to him.

I mounted the black and swung out in a wide circle, riding so that I would go past the place where I had seen the burning buildings. That homestead commenced to interest me.

The charred buildings still gave forth little wisps of white smoke. The fire had been complete and there was not so much as a cornerpost left standing. A clump of horses were fastened to a fence, and the horses bore the brand of the Half Box. I sneered. Whatever the fat man might have said, the fire had served to put him in possession—Yet he had offered ten thousand for possession for the next thirty days. Evidently he feared an attack, feared an attack that his men would not be able to repel.

A figure waddled to the group of ponies, and presently a horse cut out from the bunch. The mounted figure swung in a half-circle to intercept me.

"I wouldn't go no closer," he said pleasantly. "There's been a fire and we're trying to keep whatever evidence there may be intact so we can show the sheriff what happened."

I grinned at him.

"Who's we?"

"The owners—the Half Box," he said.

I stared at him. "You look sleepy," I said.

He lowered his eyes. "I ain't."

I kept my eyes boring into his.

"That's a lie."

His face snapped up, and his shoulders lowered, and then his wide, startled eyes took me in from head to foot, caught the writhing smile that was commencing to twist my mouth.

"God in heaven! It's Black Barr!" he exclaimed, whirled his horse, elevated his hands, and went on a gallop for his companions.

I had learned what I sought to know. I rode slowly back to town.

In front of the pool-hall the man with the cunning eyes and seamed countenance was waiting for me with outstretched, pudgy hand and evil leer.

"I'm Bob Carstairs of the Half Box. Didja see the main squeeze?"

I nodded, slowly, hostilely, not noticing the outstretched hand.

The meaning of my attitude dawned

upon him as I swung from my horse.

"Say, what'd yuh do with my bronc?"

I walked close to him, took in the unpleasant reek of his dirty body, the odor of stale tobacco on his breath, the sudden enmity of his snarling face.

"I left him where you left mine—at the Half Box, and if you want him real bad, you're at liberty to walk out for him—and let me tell you another thing. The next man to lay a hand on this horse passes in his chips. Get that?"

His face paled somewhat. He was a blusterer this man, a fourflusher who sought to save his face, but who struck through other hands and in the dark. Yet he tried to bluster, to avoid the appearance of being mastered.

"Say, where d'yuh get that stuff? I'm good natured, but yuh can't pull no blazer like that on me. I'm Carstairs, an' I'm the manager of the whole blamed Half Box an' I got half a hundred cowpunchers at my back. I'm tellin' yuh . . ."

He never finished what he had to say. I stepped forward and thrust my empty glove between his yellow teeth, thrust it well back, down his throat.

"Chew on that for a while," I said, and walked casually toward the pool-room.

His hands seemed undecided whether to reach for the glove or his gun, and hovered in the air, doing neither. In the meantime the glove refused to be spat out, and wiggled and flopped in his mouth as his chin quivered and his vocal organs vainly tried to formulate words.

The crowd on the porch of the pool-hall grinned silently, watching me with a new respect, a certain touch of awe. I made no salutation and acknowledged none, but strode into the pool-hall.

There I instantly became aware that something unusual was in progress. A crowd was beginning to pack about a card table, and I could hear the tones of a woman's voice.

I stepped forward, raised my head, the better to see, and recognized the features of the girl of the restaurant. Her hair was singed in places, but, aside from that, she was unchanged, in as perfect control of herself as though she had not been burned out of house and home, as though she were sitting in a drawing room, sipping weak tea.

"I'm offering to cut the cards for myself against your claim to the homestead," she said. "Surely you can't misunderstand me. If you win you have—me. If you lose you give me a quitclaim to the ranch."

A couple of the men in front, feeling the pressure of my elbows, turned around with a scowl, and, as soon as they saw who it was, melted to one side, leaving the way open for me to approach the table.

Then, for the first time, I noticed that there must be a faint trace of Indian blood in the girl. There was that about the corners of her eyes, now that she was excited, that spoke of Indian ancestry somewhere in the family, and that expressionless set to the lips I had seen on the face of an Indian chieftain as he was being led to the gallows for the shooting of a white man who had defrauded him.

The man at the other end of the table was handsome in a selfish sort of way, and there were devils of passion in his eyes.

"Mattie, you can't do a thing like this; you simply *can't!*" he said. "It cheapens you."

Her eyes bored into his with a tinge of scorn.

"You with your talk of cheapening myself. You didn't hesitate to try and steal the homestead from uncle. You didn't hesitate to plunge the property into a lawsuit, to prevent him from borrowing any money with the notice you filed in the recorder's office. You did all this to force me to give in—to marry you. Well and good. Here's your chance, and it's the only one you'll ever have. If you cut high you may have me. If you cut low you lose the

homestead, and give me a quitclaim for it."

His tongue caressed his lips.

"And if I win you'll come, you'll deliver the merchandise."

In the flush which came to her skin I could catch the faint tinge of coppery color.

"You have my word for that," she said.

A crowd had gathered. The word had passed with lightning rapidity, and men jostled and shoved about the card table.

"You'll have to take care of the other outfit—the Half Box, if you win," he said. "I won't guarantee to deliver possession. Just a quitclaim to all of my interest is all I'm offering if I lose."

She nodded.

"Go ahead and shuffle the cards. You talk too easily, and it makes you talk too damned much."

He shuffled the cards, attempting to ignore the snicker which ran through the crowd that ringed the table.

"Go ahead and cut," he said. "The ace is low."

With a hand that trembled not in the slightest the girl cut the pack, looked at her card and flipped it over on the table. It was the deuce of hearts.

With a bound he was up from his chair.

"Mattie! Mattie! You're mine, *mine!*"

She waved him back, her face cast into a mould of impersonal impassivity. "You haven't cut yet," she said in an expressionless tone.

Carelessly he leaned back and flipped over the first card, hardly pausing to look at it. And then a laugh struck his attention. He paused at that laugh and at something he saw in the eyes of the girl, and looked at the card. It was the ace of spades.

The man stood rooted to the spot, the color draining from his handsome, sensuous face. The girl had drawn herself proudly erect, a barrier between them that had become as permanent as death.

"I'm waiting for the deed," she remarked.

He dashed a hand across his eyes.

"That wasn't a fair cut. I turned my back on the deck for a second, and someone slipped that ace on top. You'll have to cut again—to give me one more chance. Anyway it was the best two out of three. You didn't specify, and that's the way it always goes. Horse and horse, anyhow."

Bah! The fourflusher. I dropped my hand to my hip and leaned forward.

She spared me the trouble. Her hand came from a fold of her shawl, and an ugly automatic peeped forth.

"That's the reason I never could care very much for you," she said. "You always were such a grandstander, such a fourflusher. Make out that deed, and if you lay a hand on me I'll shoot you."

He sighed, glanced helplessly around him, then sank at the table and began to scribble out a deed. I made for the open air. Nine times out of ten a handsome man is yellow underneath, and this bird had the features of a statue . . . Bah!

And, as I made for the door, I caught a glimpse of a furtive movement at my side. Wing Lee, the Chink of the restaurant was slipping a long knife up his sleeve. Evidently the girl had another string to her bow, even if she hadn't known it. I had not seen the Chinaman in the circle of spectators, but I recognized the gesture with which that knife was sheathed.

I laughed, and he glanced up at the laugh, but his face was as expressionless as the countenance of an idol.

"You come supper?" he inquired.

"Sure, Wing Lee, I come supper," I told him. I was beginning to have a great liking for this Chink.

The girl took her quitclaim, walked past the crowd of men that hung around

the pool-room, with head up and eyes flashing, climbed on her horse and galloped away. I knew that the homestead was in the actual possession of the Half Box outfit, and wondered whether she was headed for an interview with the fat bird.

I STROLLED into Wing Lee's for an early supper. He glittered his beady eyes at me and crooked his finger, leading the way into that back corridor where the booths were located. Pausing before the entrance to one of them he flipped back the curtain and bowed.

Watching him, I stepped inside, and then a rustle of motion told me that the booth was occupied. In an instant I was on the defensive, my hands racing to my guns.

A feminine laugh interrupted the motion.

"Wing Lee insists that you are a friend."

It was the girl of the homestead, the war dance, the cut cards, and there was a lazy amusement in her voice, almost a note of superiority.

I bowed.

"He allee time makum heap tlouble Half Box," explained Wing Lee to the girl, the words rushing out in a burst of sing-song eloquence, as though to justify his action to her. "He no 'flaid. No matter big man, little man, quick man, slow man, allee same, he fixum. One man already he shootum, one man stickum glove in mouth no talkum. He heap smart man. He allee samee one piecee fliend."

With which introduction he dropped the curtain and was gone.

"Sit down, Black Barr," said the girl. "I am Mattie Bevans. I take it that we're both pleased to meet each other, so we can eliminate all those preliminary formalities. I also take it that you're not overly pleased at having Wing Lee catapult you into the mess that I'm in, so we'll just forget that. With Wing Lee a man who is unfriendly to the Half Box or the Flying M must be a friend of mine since I'm fighting both of them."

I watched her closely. She had received the benefit of a college education somewhere. Her poise, the diction of her words, her easy manner showed her training, her education. Now that there was no trace of emotion on her face, it was almost impossible to detect the slight strain of Indian blood which had become noticeable when she was excited, had become apparent through her very immobility of expression.

"When I last sought to have words with you, you sent a few rifle shots at me," I remarked, exhibiting the brim of my hat.

Instantly her eyes hardened, and the lips seemed to take on that peculiar, expressionless set.

"You were there at the burning?" and the coppery tint showed once more in her skin, while one hand dropped below the level of the table.

"I was there shortly afterward. I was awakened by the red glow and came to see if I could be of any assistance. In my position one does not sleep within buildings, but out in the open, and at a different place each night. I saw you while you were . . . er . . . dancing."

Her hand came up from under the table, and her mouth softened slightly although the coppery tinge deepened.

"And you were shocked to find a girl with hardly any clothes on dancing around the burning building?"

There was something hostile in the tone.

"Miss Bevans, I have lived much. I have hated much, and I have fought much. There are times when rage requires some physical outlet. The more overwhelming the odds, the more necessity for deferred action, the more need there is for physical expression of rage. And then again, it was a ceremonial dance. I have seen it before—once."

Her hand abruptly came across the table and rested on my own.

"Black Barr, thank you. Thank you for understanding. I am part Indian, and I am proud of it. That was the dance of revenge, and I needed to dance it or go mad. My uncle and I located that homestead. It was ours, our title never questioned, until we sunk a well. Then it appeared that a narrow belt of artesian water ran along the place, down from the canyon. Artesian water is more precious than gold in this country. Immediately both of the big cattle camps claimed that the homestead was within the lines of their survey. They took us into court, hired crooked surveyors, bribed witnesses, and finally, tried to run us out of the country, to burn the place, to obtain possession. My uncle was killed two nights ago, and then they thought they had me, but I stuck it out, put up the best fight I could.

"This afternoon I disposed of the Flying M. The Half Box is another matter. Ed Boswell has built up his land holdings by dirty work. He is a land grabber, a ranch pirate, and he knows no mercy. He keeps himself surrounded by gunfighters. Let a man get a reputation for being a killer, and immediately Ed Boswell hears of it, searches him out, gives him a bonus to come to work for the Half Box."

The curtain was thrust back and Wing Lee began to deposit platters containing such viands as I hardly believed could exist in this remote section. He had evidently been cooking all afternoon.

The girl rewarded him with a swift smile. I said nothing, realizing that I was merely an incidental guest.

"Wing Lee has been a jewel," she said. "He was our cook at one time, and he has the loyalty of the Chinese, a loyalty that cannot be purchased or destroyed."

I nodded.

"To return to the subject," I said as soon as Wing Lee's shuffling footsteps had receded down the rough board hallway. "I saw you cutting cards this afternoon, but I didn't see you after that."

She looked at me steadily.

"I went to Ed Boswell with the same proposition," she said. That homestead was all we had. I cannot carry on litigation for it. I haven't the money."

"And you wanted it that bad!" I exclaimed incredulously.

"Certainly not!" she snapped, her eyes blazing into mine. "What do you think I am?" And then, her fury subsiding, she went on. "Pardon me, I forgot that you could not know. My uncle and I owned each a half interest. My own interest I care nothing about, but there was a girl, a child of my uncle's who is East in school. She is a helpless, lovable little kitten, impractical—perhaps weak. The homestead has been paying a good income, and will pay much more now that the water has been discovered. I am fighting for that girl. To have her income stopped will mean . . . well it will mean much to her. She is easily influenced."

I thought for a moment.

"And did you cut cards with Ed Boswell? I asked.

Her mouth set again. "He said there was no use gambling for the possession of that which providence had already given to him."

"Meaning the ranch?" I asked.

She shook her head. "Meaning me."

"What!"

She nodded and dropped her eyes. "He ordered his men to see that I did not leave the ranch, shut me in a room, sought to hold me a prisoner, to have myself as well as the homestead . . . They forgot to search me. One of the guards I shot—not seriously, unfortunately. They tried to recapture me, but my horse was fast."

I sought her gaze.

"Suppose you had lost in that card cutting?"

She shrugged her shoulders. "Either man would have given me enough to keep the girl in school. You don't

understand. I am desperate. Our house has been destroyed, our barn, our hay. Our stock has been run off. I'm out of possession of the property, and have no money to pay the lawyers—and I am fighting unlimited capital."

There was nothing in her tone which suggested a plea for sympathy. Merely she reported facts.

"And can I be of some assistance?" I asked, more to see what her reply would be than otherwise. My own mind was already made up. From what I had seen and heard of some of the actors in this land piracy, Fate was, indeed, tired of many of the residents of Caliente Valley.

She shook her head emphatically. "I have nothing to offer by way of pay, and I would not either ask for, nor accept your aid otherwise. Now let's talk of something else; one would think that mine were the only troubles in the world."

With that she commenced to talk of books, seeking with almost childish eagerness to learn what I knew of them. As it happens, books are my one source of recreation, one friend that I can confide in and take with me. In my saddlebag I always have one or more books, sent me by mail, carried with me to read on the long trails, about my camp fires on the desert. An education is at once a privilege and a curse. I, too, have been through the best of the Eastern colleges, and my mind cannot remain inactive, cannot hibernate within a shell. On my travels I must have something with which to occupy my mind.

For an hour the girl talked, and in her eagerness actually forgot her troubles. It was not until she mentioned the wonderful collection of books in her library that her eyes suddenly clouded and her mouth took on that woodenish, expressionless look—and then I knew that her library had been destroyed in the fire.

She had been eating as she talked, and Wing Lee's face beamed approval as he brought in a dessert.

"Thing be allee light now," he said, confidently; and, even as he spoke, my ears caught the stealthy creak of footsteps along the floor behind him.

I was on my feet, my hands ready to drop to my guns by the time the huge figure hulked in the doorway. It was the heavy-set man with the seamed face and cunning eyes, and there was an oily smirk upon his evil countenance.

"Yuh craved some action with the card cuttin' out at the ranch, Miss Bevans, an' the boss has decided to give it to yuh. He's squeezed himself into a buckboard, an' come in. He'll meet yuh at the Green Leaf."

I held no love for Bob Carstairs, and I felt that I would have something to say to him shortly, so I advanced slightly, getting my eyes where he could not avoid them. A shapely hand pressed my arm, however, and the words which were on my lips never came.

"Never mind, Mr. Barr. It is the best way after all. I will get it over with, one way or another. Let's go."

And, hearing those words, Bob Carstairs stood not upon the order of his departure, but shambled swiftly and awkwardly out of the place, like a great bear shuffling down the side of a mountain. It was that very haste, that cunning leer of his face which gave me concern, but there was no chance to talk to the girl. She was tripping out of the room with the lithe grace of a panther. I followed.

Without, there, could be discerned the vague form of a buckboard, illuminated by the light of the stars and the reddish gleam which came from the window of the restaurant. Within the buckboard, pressing it down until the springs seemed entirely flattened, the huge bulk that sat in the driver's seat leered out at us with oily triumph. Ed Boswell seemed even fatter than when I had seen him at the ranch. His hairy hands held the reins; his great weight careened the buckboard well to one side, and his greasy countenance essayed a

lardy smile as he chirped to the horses and started slowly toward the Green Leaf, one of the popular gambling halls of the little place.

On either side was his bodyguard, splendidly mounted on spirited horses. Their hands fluttered about the butts of their guns, and their eyes were ever on me. Half a block behind, there bulked the dark forms of many horsemen. It had all the earmarks of a fight, and I swung to the saddle of my black and followed down to the Green Leaf with the corners of my mouth commencing to twitch with nervous rage.

Somehow word seemed to have reached the gambling place of the event that was to take place, for men were gathered on either side of the door, forming a living lane down which the principal actors in the drama went their way.

The girl stepped quickly, gracefully, with impassive face, dainty ankles and easy carriage. Five men helped the huge bulk of Ed Boswell, owner of the Half Box, from the buckboard, and he wheezed and waddled into the room, his face wreathed with exultation. Bob Carstairs shambled along behind, seeming almost dwarfed behind the huge carcass of his master.

Then the others hung slightly back, and I was the next to enter the room, my guns swinging, and my eyes continually watching the gunmen who escorted me on either side, the bodyguard of Ed Boswell, paid killers, who had been instructed as to their duties, and there could be but little doubt as to what those instructions had been. They never took their eyes from my hands, or their own hands from their guns. They were watching, waiting.

The girl and Boswell sat at a vacant card table, and Boswell's thick, puffy fingers shuffled a deck of cards, while his eyes rested hungrily on the girl's face. At one side there reposed a long, legal-looking document.

"Here's the cards, and here's a quit-claim deed to the homestead," he wheezed, his eyes fixed intently upon the girl. "We cut the cards. If I'm low you take the deed. If I'm high I take you."

The girl nodded, her face coppery in its impassivity, her eyes fixed on the fat hands that shuffled the cards.

I could not see more. I dared not let these paid killers get at my back, and it was necessary for me to work back against the wall. Here I stood on a chair and could catch glimpses of the tables, the cards, the faces of the two players. Before me, their eyes continually upon me, watching every motion, were the two killers, and several of the cowpunchers loitered about in significant attitudes, their hands on their guns, their eyes and attention only half occupied by the action at the table. They outnumbered me fifteen to one, and they were ready for me.

The oily, hairy hands fumbled with the cards, picking one from the very top of the deck. It was the ten of clubs.

A tense sigh ran around that room like a breath of wind rustling through dry sage; and then the slender arm of the girl came into view. Her well formed fingers spread out the other cards in the deck and picked one from well toward the bottom.

She pulled the card back, away from the deck, face down, and hesitated a moment before she turned it.

"If it is lower than the ten you get me. If it is higher I get the deed," she said, as though she feared some trickery.

Boswell wrinkled his fat neck in what was meant for a nod, but his eyes never left the girl's face.

There was something uncanny about the power of the man. It was his eyes that gave the impression. They were as steady as a rock, as keen as an eagle's, as remorseless as a cat's, and they surmounted great puffs of baggy flesh which seemed somehow out of place beneath the piercing immobility of those steady eyes.

The girl slowly flipped the card—A nine of diamonds!

Instantly there became apparent a swift tension about the room. Men seemed frozen into rigid suspense. Only at the back of the table was there a commotion. A commotion where a yellow face with beady, glittering eyes swirled through a sea of faces.

It was the voice of the girl, calm, steady, self contained which stopped him, which held me.

"Wing Lee, stop!" she commanded. "You and Barr will both remain quiet. I have gambled and I have lost."

I thrilled to think that she had mentioned my name, that she had known me well enough, even in the brief time of our acquaintance, to be sure that I stood ready to help her, to back whatever play she might make.

But she would have none of it.

"I have lost, and I will pay," she repeated, standing as a queen might stand. "If I am not given a chance to pay my honest debt, if you seek to thwart me, I will kill myself. Rather death than the feeling that I gambled in a one-sided game where I might win but could not lose."

She meant it, this girl who had descended from the most ancient race in America. In her veins flowed the blood of proud chieftans, men who had unflinchingly stood at the stake and watched burning splinters of pine eat into their bleeding flesh. Not one whimper would ever escape her. She had staked her all on a cut of the cards and had lost—and she would play the game.

Swiftly, she made for the door, climbed into the buckboard and called to Boswell. "I am ready. Hurry!"

He could not hurry, but he appreciated the danger of the moment, knew the necessity for getting away with his prize, and he did the best he could. The floor bent and sagged beneath the great weight of the man as his fat legs took short steps, his weight balanced by an arm on the shoulder of a cowpuncher who stood on either side.

All of the time the killers stood, watching me, tense, ready; and my hand was stayed, stayed by the words of the girl.

There came a great commotion from without, the creaking of springs, the grunts of laboring men, and Ed Boswell was in the buckboard with his prize. There came the sound of a spoken command to the horses, the rattle of wheels, and they drove off into the night, escorted by a half circle of cowpunchers, an armed guard that protected the rear.

I sighed, got down from my chair and walked past the two killers who still watched me, walked to the card table, and reached for the deck of cards that still remained scattered over the green cloth, all but two of the cards face down, the winning ten and the fatal nine showing with faces up.

"Don't touch those cards."

The words were those of Bob Carstairs, and there was a certain tension in his tone which convinced me he had remained behind for a purpose—probably to pick a fight with me, a fight in which his two killers could effectively dispose of me. Very well, it would be a showdown.

I straightened, my hands dropping, my mouth commencing to writhe and twist in its deadly smile.

"And why not?"

"Boswell wants 'em. He told me to bring them out to the ranch. He wants 'em for a souvineer."

"Tell Ed Boswell that I also desired them as a souvenir, and that *I* got them," I said, and again reached for the pack, but this time I reached with my left hand. My right remained near my holster.

There was a tense silence, a moment of hesitating uncertainty. The killers flickered their eyes anxiously at Bob Carstairs, waiting for orders, and Bob Carstairs flecked his lips with his tongue, and refrained from giving the signal

that would have turned the gambling room into a shambles.

It is not often that I am surprised, but this was one of the times. I had confidently expected that the men would start shooting as I reached for the cards. I knew that Ed Boswell had left his bodyguard of killers behind for but one purpose, to finish me. Why then didn't they do it? Why overlook such an opportunity?

I could not reason out the answer, but put the deck of cards in my coat pocket, and backed to the crude bar which ran the length of the room on one side, my hands still ready, mouth still twitching.

Slowly, a bit at a time, by imperceptible degrees, the tension relaxed. Spectators left their places along the walls to advance cautiously toward the center of the room. A cowpuncher ordered a drink. Somewhere a chair scraped. There came the rattle of chips, and a poker game started, slowly, stiffly at first, but gradually getting more into the swing of accustomed usage.

Carstairs and his killers still remained in the room, gravitating toward each other, getting sufficiently close so that the gunmen could hear the whisper which came from Carstair's lips. I could see the thick lips move, but could not catch the words, even though I knew their import. Those words were my death warrant, some instructions which would have to do with concerted action, with a swift rush for guns when I was off my guard. . . . Bah! The man was obvious, as transparent as a window pane, and yet—why did he not do something? Why had he let me get that deck of cards? Why had he not started to shoot it out when I had one hand busy gathering up the pasteboards?

Half an hour passed, a tense half hour while the killers watched and I waited. Perhaps it was their intention to wait until all of the witnesses would have their eyes elsewhere, perhaps they were seeking to have me relax, to catch me off my guard. Perhaps, after all, they had been instructed not to start things, but merely to watch and make sure I did not follow the buckboard.

And then, suddenly, a suspicion crossed my mind. Were they afraid to shoot while I was gathering those cards because they dared not let the spectators see those cards. If I were shot, or if I killed them, either way, there would be a rush of spectators and the cards would be still on the table. Mentally, I kicked myself for not having thought of it sooner.

That would answer everything. It would even explain their present inactivity. They were afraid to pick a fight, to kill me, knowing that the deck of cards would be found on my body.

I kept my eyes on them, dropped one hand to my coat pocket, took out the cards, and riffled through the corners of the deck while the pack was still half in my coat.

I should have known. Fat Ed Boswell gambled only with certainties, took no chances. The deck was a phony one. There was only one high card in it, the ten. The rest of the cards were nines, eights, sevens, sixes, on down to deuces. The girl had walked into a trap. In the tension of that moment no one had thought of the cards. The demeanor of the actors of the drama, the momentous possibilities of the occasion had engrossed the attention of every one. Boswell had managed to keep his high card on the top of the deck throughout his shuffle, and the girl had stood no chance.

Cold rage flowed through my veins, and my mouth felt like a snake crawling over my face. Bob Carstair's horrified eyes read the expression rightly, knew that I had peeked at the deck, had solved the mystery of the cut cards.

He coughed, a wheezy, spasmodic cough—and that cough was a signal.

They were quick, those gunmen, but I had little attention for them. My own moves had already been planned. They swept into action with absolute unison, the swift rhythm which is the criterion of gunfighters the West over, but they

were too slow. In the first place I had read decision in the eyes of Bob Carstairs even before the sound of that cough had penetrated to the consciousness of the killers.

My guns were coming from their holsters before the first sputter of that cough had emanated from the thick lips of the plotter, and my shots went, not for the paid gunmen, but for the lights.

There were two lanterns, burning with a filament and they were placed on either wall. My first two bullets made dead center shots and plunged the place in total darkness; but even as I pulled the triggers I could see the guns of the killers coming out, could see even Bob Carstairs himself tugging at a gun which he carried in a holster, back of his fat hip. He was unbelievably awkward as he sought to twist his huge body about and get at that weapon.

However, I had no time to waste on revenge. Somewhere in the night the proud girl had gone forth to ally herself to the slimy beast who had tricked her into submission. My first work was to be done there, and I must escape from that gambling hall, from the watchful eyes of the two guards if I were going to be of any assistance to the girl.

With the darkness came the flashing of guns, the crash of bullets, the acrid fumes of powder, nor was I at any pains this time not to return the fire. I shot at the flashes as well as I was able, kept my guns blazing so that the innocent bystanders would fall back, hug the floor and keep out of my way.

I gained the welcome freshness of the star-studded night, vaulted into the saddle of my snorting black, and reloaded my guns as I galloped away into the darkness, following the trail to the Half Box ranch.

Behind me came a thundering mass of horseflesh, a jumble of pursuing men. I could hear hoarse shouts, curses, the rattle of pistols, the whizzing of bullets.

I bent low and spoke to the black. We would be at the ranch well in advance of those who pursued. The black had never failed me, nor would he now. I could feel the bunching of his muscles beneath the creaking saddle, the snap of his stride, the ripple of smooth action, and the desert beneath me swept past in a white blur.

I wasted no time firing at my pursuers, but helped my horse by sitting low, quietly, balanced in the saddle. At high speed the faintest suggestion of motion of the rider will throw the horse out of balance just enough to interfere slightly with his stride, and I was measuring my plan for future activity in seconds, in fractions of seconds.

Slowly, I drew away from my pursuers. The firing behind me ceased, and there was no sound to reach my ears save the drumming of the hoofs of the black as he thundered his way across the floor of the elevated valley. Ahead there flickered a faint light—a light which showed redly for a minute and then was gone. Again it showed, then glowed steadily, becoming momentarily brighter. Other lights appeared—the Half Box outfit.

I checked the horse I was riding, checked him to a trot, a swift, silent walk, led him from the main trail to the shelter of a barn, left him in the dark shadows, the reins twisted over the horn of the saddle. He understood, this black horse, and he would wait there for my whistle, and then come to me.

Perhaps it was instinct which led me to the dark window at the rear of the ranch house, perhaps it was sheer luck. It might have been either.

I slipped through the dark oblong, into the musty mystery of a strange room. The house seemed strangely silent, a silence which suddenly savored of a trap, a trap which was baited, set, ready to spring. My hands dropped to my sides, ready to jerk out my guns, and I stood, poised, tense, balanced on the balls of my feet, waiting.

Still there was no sound. The velvety blackness of the house seemed something tangible, a cloak that could be touched, that closed in upon me, oppressive,

heavy, stifling. There was none of those faint creaks which come to deserted houses at night, none of those settling noises which, while at first startling the senses, nevertheless, lend a comforting feeling of physical contact with the walls and floors.

I tiptoed across the room, toward the faintest possible thread of light which seemed to indicate a door. My hand groped along the wall, the rasping of the fingertips seeming magnified a thousand fold, and then my fingers closed on the knob of the door.

From without came the sound of galloping hoofs. There was a shout, a welcoming hail, a medley of excited questions and answers, and then the rhythmic pulsations of the thundering hoofbeats of running horses broke up into a series of irregular ruddy-tud-thuds as horses were drawn up and riders leapt to the ground. There was no time to be lost if I would be of any service to the girl, and I threw open the door.

A surprise awaited me. My senses had not been in error after all. That intuitive warning which had mentioned a trap to my unheeding mind had been no idle worry of strained nerves. They were waiting for me, and there was a smile upon the flabby lips of Ed Boswell as he looked at the door, his eyes gleaming as cold and compassionless as ever, his hands folded in his lap, the flesh billowing in greasy folds over his immobile face. On either side of him stood his bodyguard, and their hands were on their guns, their eyes also on the door.

They had left that window open as a trap, and I had walked into it.

Mattie Bevans stood to one side, her hand at her breast, her eyes wide, but there was none of the helpless doll about her. Her lips were firm, her chin up in the air and her eyes steady.

"Ah, yes, Black Barr, himself," piped Boswell. "You have just broken and entered, and I shall be compelled to turn you over to the authorities for imprisonment. I thought that *perhaps* you would take advantage of that open window. It leads directly into the outer room of my study, you see. And, of course, I would not want any visitor to call and find me remiss in my duties as host."

In a strained, detached, impersonal tone, the girl spoke to me.

"Mr. Barr, you apparently do not understand that I have made a choice of my own free will. You have mentioned Fate. Surely Fate has willed that I should solve my problems in this way—and I have given my word to Mr. Boswell."

I noticed then that the big man was fingering the quitclaim deed, that he had taken it from his pocket and was twirling it in his fingers. It was as though he tried to impress upon the girl that she had gambled, that she had cut cards with Fate, and that she had lost.

I had need of my hands near my guns at that moment, but I risked a bullet to make a spectacular play. My hand pulled the cards from my pocket and spread them, face upward, on the table.

"Perhaps before you question the wisdom of Fate you should see just how far her decision had been anticipated," I said, shortly. "This is the deck which Boswell shuffled and gave you to cut."

Her eyes looked at the cards, and the coppery tinge of her cheeks became more pronounced. Her face remained firm, calm, expressionless, but her eyes seemed to be covered with a film of black fire. Quick as a panther, as accurately as a hawk, she swooped forward, and her hand darted toward the bosom of her dress.

As though the motion had been a signal, the guards stiffened, and, at that moment, there came the sounds of heavy feet on the wooden porch, a clamoring of many voices as the front door swung open.

They started for their guns at the same time, those guards. They had caught, and correctly interpreted the

twisting, writhing smile which distorted my features.

They were quick, these men, but not quick enough. My hands seemed literally to fly through the air, and I could feel the jarring recoil of my heavy weapons even before I fully realized that my wrists had jerked the muzzles free from the holsters. In my draw I never pause for aim, never seek to raise my arms. My hands drop to my guns, and I am pulling back the hammers even as I pull the guns. The trigger is held against the guard, and such aiming as I do is done in that infinitesimal, split fraction of a heartbeat during which the hammer is descending upon the firing cap of the shell. It is merely a flip of the wrist.

Four guns thundered, and to the ears of the uninitiated it would have seemed that they roared their messages of death in unison; but the two killers were dead when they fired. Two bullets had torn their black hearts asunder, and they were falling as they discharged their weapons. The girl, swift though she had been, still had her hand groping in the bosom of her dress. The action she had seen had been the action of trained men, killers against a killer, the pick of the Border ruffians against one who had need of his skill for others besides himself.

And then there came a shout from the hallway.

The door stood open behind me, that door through which I had made my way, and back of which I knew was an open window leading into the night.

I had no time to enjoy the expression of utter incredulity which pushed its way to the surface of Ed Boswell's face, fighting upward through the folds of fat as a swimmer fights to the surface; had no time even to estimate the strength of the force at the door. It was a time for action, and quick action at that. I swept Mattie Bevans back into the darkness of that room and slammed the door, nor was I a second too soon.

The warm, velvety darkness of the room closed about us, and then the silence of the night was shattered by a burst of firing. Light trickled into the room through jagged, splintered holes which appeared in the door as by some magic.

Nor did I need to explain matters to the girl. She rushed for the oblong of darkness which marked the star-studded location of the open window as direct as though she had been a homing pigeon seeking the air. Together we went through the opening, seemingly almost at the same instant, so close was I upon her heels. Behind us came the pack. The door banged open, and there sounded the shouts of men, the rattle of pistols, the foul-mouthed curses of ruffians who saw their prey escaping; and, through the open door, in that brief instant while I looked back, I could catch a glimpse of Ed Boswell, sitting in that chair, held in one position by the great billows of flesh which enveloped him, motionless by his very weight, almost helpless, incapable of quick action.

Only for a second was the sight burnt in on my vision, and then I had jerked my head down and to one side, and the darkness above was punctuated by ruddy spurts of stabbing flame.

We made the corner of the porch, and the girl would have made a run for it through the darkness, straight for the open, but I held her back There was no time for words, nor would I have wasted them on her. Ed Boswell had held a quitclaim deed in his hairy, oily hand when the action started, and I did not propose that he be left with it.

And, even at that, it was the best move Twenty cowpunchers were on my trail, were determined on having my life, and to rush out into the open would have been to give them a certain, unbeatable advantage. By rushing around the corner of the house, half doubling on our tracks, we were able to baffle them, to start them running in several directions, calling out in their confusion.

The girl was dressed in a dark suit,

and never have I had occasion to be more thankful for the dark garments which I habitually wear. There was nothing to give them a clue, no fluttering, filmy veil to wave at them as we rounded the corner, no billowy skirts to have revealed a flash of white petticoat. Dark, silent, swift, we skirted the corner of the house, my hand holding the arm of the girl in an iron grip.

Another spurt and another corner. The front steps loomed before us, and they were deserted. All of the cowpunchers, like so many banded sheep, had stampeded through the front door at the sound of the firing, had gone into the room from which we had made our escape, had stumbled over each other in making for the window.

To the surprise of the girl, I guided her up those steps and into the house we had so lately quitted. Breathless, hurried, but determined, we thrust our way into the study, and paused before the figure which hulked in the chair.

On either side there lay the killers, the paid bodyguard who had escorted the big man wherever he went, who had worked in shifts, two on and two off. Two of the killers had accompanied him to town and been left behind to account for me; these two had remained, to watch their master when he returned with his prize, and these two had paid the penalty for their part in the affair. They sprawled in the awkward postures of men who have met death suddenly and unexpectedly.

Ed Boswell hulked in his chair, absolutely immobile, his eyes wide and staring straight ahead, his hands resting on his lap.

"The deed!" I ordered, turning one of my guns toward his fat stomach.

He neither moved nor answered, but sat rigid, ignoring my presence and my summons, his putty-like face a sickly hue, his lips slightly blued, his eyes seemingly somewhat filmed, but steady.

And then something caught my attention. It was a trickle of red, and it drew my eye at the same time my forehead puckered in bewilderment over his strange calm, his placid self-possession.

I bent forward and looked again. The handle of a knife protruded from his chest, over the heart, and the handle was almost buried in the sagging folds of fat. A long knife it was, and it had penetrated neatly and cleanly at the first thrust. The man was stone dead.

I glanced at his hands, and his hands were empty.

And then I caught a quick sound, a gasping of breath, a slight wheezing sigh.

Bob Carstairs stood in the doorway, his face mottled, his eyes protruding, his chest heaving, and his hands resting on the guns at his side. Beside him, and slightly to one side, were the two killers who had escorted Ed Boswell to town, who had remained behind at the gambling hall. Their faces were working and twisting with the excitement of the moment, in an effort to lend speed to their flying hands.

But I was ready. My own guns were out. They would have drawn and fired without compunction while I had my back to them, but now that I had seen them, now that the laboring lungs of Bob Carstairs had given me a warning, they hesitated.

Bob Carstairs squirmed slightly, his face paling, the big bulk shifting to one foot then the other, his hands working, ever nearer to his guns, indecision in his eyes, fear in his heart, and treachery in his mind. He would mask the moves of the two men behind him with the bulk of his body, would throw himself to one side at the proper time and leave me to face the blazing guns of the other killers.

And he did just that, but his body moved slowly, clumsily. The guns of the killers blazed, but mine as well, and I have noticed that it is hard for men to shoot straight when they are face to face with a man who is known for straight, cool shooting.

Their craven natures told. Nights of carousal, days of indolent laziness,

years of dissipation, all had left their marks in a nervous system which could not properly co-ordinate at the critical time, in spirits which lacked the moral courage to go down into the valley of the shadow in equal combat.

One bullet hit me in the flesh of the arm, one tore through my coat, but my own bullets crashed forth with deadly accuracy.

Ten seconds later and we were in the yard. A whistle and my black was with me, and I speedily located another horse. The pursuing cowpunchers had rushed to the scene of the latest burst of firing, and there was something in what they saw there which gave them a check. Ed Boswell was dead. The four killers whom he had kept in his service as a bodyguard, as hired murderers, reputed to be the swiftest and most accurate shots on the Border, had been sprawled face down upon the floor. Bob Carstairs was lying on his back, his glazed eyes staring upward in startled incredulity, his black heart stilled forever, and, out in the darkness, Black Barr waited with loaded guns. It was not a situation which made these hired land-grabbers feel any too enthusiastic about pursuit. They hesitated, held back, leaderless, each waiting for the other, and each questioning in his own mind whether there remained any incentive for him to risk his life against the death which lurked in the darkness.

Oh, yes, they came, but it was a half-hearted pursuit, and the scattering volleys which rattled forth upon the still night air were more for the sake of keeping up their own spirits than for the purpose of actually accomplishing any damage.

By common consent we swung in a great half circle, headed toward the homestead. We were cleaning things up, paying off old scores, righting wrongs, and I wanted the girl to have possession of that homestead.

To myself I was grateful for the trace of Indian blood in the girl. She rode proudly, swiftly, with none of the hysterical thanks or babbling comment which might have characterized another girl.

And so we rode, stirrup to stirrup, the floor of the valley slipping beneath the hoofs of our mounts, the sand and gravel rattling on the sage and cacti, while the pursuit dropped behind, and, finally, turned back.

Out in the darkness there gleamed a flickering light. Even as we watched, the light took on new body and a tongue of flame licked greedily upward against the dark background of silhouetted hills. It was the camp fire of the watchers who guarded the homestead, seeking to retain possession at all costs.

"You will stay back here until I call," I told the girl, the first words I had spoken since leaving the Half Box outfit.

Her face was a white blur in the starlight, and I could not see the expression, but I could and did see the sudden uptilting of the chin, the set of the shoulders. She swung her horse even closer and came on, running stride for stride, her stirrup leather actually touching mine at times. Useless to argue with such a girl. The veneer of civilization had given to her merely a feeling of independence, a will to do as she wished, a sex emancipation. At heart she was a savage.

Together we pounded up to the barbed wire barrier which had been erected. There were shadowy forms to receive us, men rolling out of blankets at a whispered summons, the watchers who had been doing sentry duty, tending the fire.

From the confidence of the man who came forward to meet us, I was satisfied that riflemen were concealed in the darkness, ready to shoot us down at the first sign of trouble. I wasted no time.

"I am Black Barr, and I have with me the owner of this homestead. I want possession."

The very crispness of the message puzzled the man for a moment. He parried for time.

"You'll have to see Ed Boswell. We're taking our orders from him."

"I have seen Ed Boswell," I said slowly, evenly.

"What did *he* say?" asked the guard.

"He is dead," I retorted gravely.

From the darkness there came a slight stirring, no motion which could be sensed, but a vague feeling of psychic unrest as when invisible men shift their positions uncomfortably, peer doubtfully at each other.

I gathered that the force had been somewhat reduced to take part in the visit to the card-room at the Green Leaf. The very fact of my presence there with the girl at my side told them much. They were rapidly losing heart.

"You'll have to see Bob Carstairs, then."

I kept my tone low, steady, deadly. "I have seen Bob Carstairs."

There was a pause while I could hear a rasping in the other's throat as he swallowed, gulped, sought to keep his voice steady.

"What did *he* say?"

"He is dead."

The man fidgeted, mumbled something about "seeing the boys," and stepped slightly to one side.

It was a time for action, for complete assurance, a chance to dominate the situation by sheer force of personality. I swung from my horse with calm, deliberate manner, and approached the barrier. "Where's the gate in this thing?" I asked.

"Ov—over this way," said the watcher, and himself pulled back the twisted wire gate.

I entered, and the girl was at my heels. The man fell back, undecided. I knew the type, recognized the symptoms. I would have no trouble with him. He was licked. It was those men who were scattered through the darkness who worried me.

"Here, you fellows, come on up here to the fire," I said.

There was a silence, and then suddenly, that silence was broken by a metallic double click—the cocking of a rifle.

My ears are acutely sensitive, and I recognized the sound at once. It was the crucial moment. If the men yielded to my order they would leave the property, never to return. If I should allow them to hesitate, permit them to start a fight, my doom was sealed. They outnumbered me, and they were invisible in the darkness.

"Stick 'em up, Barr," came a rasping voice.

I had been prepared for that voice. The double click had warned me, had given me the direction of the danger, had enabled me to brace my muscles so that the smooth, ripple of motion which jerked out my gun, which sent a shot crashing into the darkness was no mere chance. I had deliberately planned my move. The hand that drew the gun had been on the side away from the fire. The eyes of the man in the darkness, looking toward the glow of the flame, could not have seen the motion. The bullet was sent toward the location of the speaker. Shooting always by the feel of the gun, never by an alignment of the sights, I had acquired an accuracy which was as deadly in the dark as in the daylight.

With the shot came a scream.

"Don't shoot!"

A man arose to his feet, clutching a dangling arm which was bleeding at the shoulder. All about me, from the darkness, men came to the fire, hands uplifted.

"Get your things together and start, and don't come back," I said. "The next man who sets foot on this ground will have to account to Black Barr."

In silence they gathered their things, saddled their picketed stock, and filed through the gate in the barrier. The man in the lead broke into a gallop, and soon the men were headed in a mad, panic-stricken race for the ranch-house of the Half Box. They were not fighters, merely Border toughs, and they were yellow, clean through.

"And do we stay here?" asked the girl.

I shook my head. "We have taken possession, ejected the guards, and you will have no more trouble. Had they headed toward town we would have stayed, but they went to the ranch. What they will find there will convince them that they are finished. Hired killers do not fight when their pay has ceased. Cowards cease to obey orders which are given by dead lips."

She nodded.

Together again we trotted toward town.

There was a light in the restaurant of Wing Lee. I had hoped it would be there. Probably the girl would collapse when she could let down from the nervous strain under which she labored. The Chinaman had been a family servant, and there is a loyalty in the Chinese race which knows no bounds.

Wing Lee, himself, came to the door.

And then came a surprise. Both the Chinaman and the girl turned to me with a series of swift efficient motions. The patch of light from the door had revealed my blood-soaked sleeve, the wound which had been slowly welling blood during my long ride.

While the girl applied hot water and bandages the Chinaman brought forth certain native lotions, evil-smelling, pungent, contained in red-labeled bottles of thick glass, bottles which were three inches high, an inch wide and contained but a score of drops when filled.

"You big killum," announced Wing Lee when the arm had been bandaged and he was serving tea to the girl and myself.

I said nothing. Evidently he knew something, this Chink.

The girl's eyes looked me over, and there was something of a caress in her look. To my surprise I found that I understood her better through silence than I had been able to understand many other women through words. Between us there was some tangible bond of psychic affinity which, though invisible, linked us together in a common bond. I could feel it, struggle against it as I might. I am Black Barr, the killer, and the love of a good woman is not for me. Had the girl spoken I would have been rude, have shattered her faith in me, but she did not speak, merely penetrated the inner silences of my soul.

And then the Chinaman broke into his weird chant, a wild, ululating hymn of pagan hate.

"You heap killum!" he said at length, ceasing his music, his beady eyes glowing like polished ebony.

I endeavored to explain to him and to the girl at the same time. "I am the executioner of Fate, Wing Lee. I go ridum my horse. Maybe Fate gettum tired somebody. She send me. Man he fight me. I killum, then go 'way."

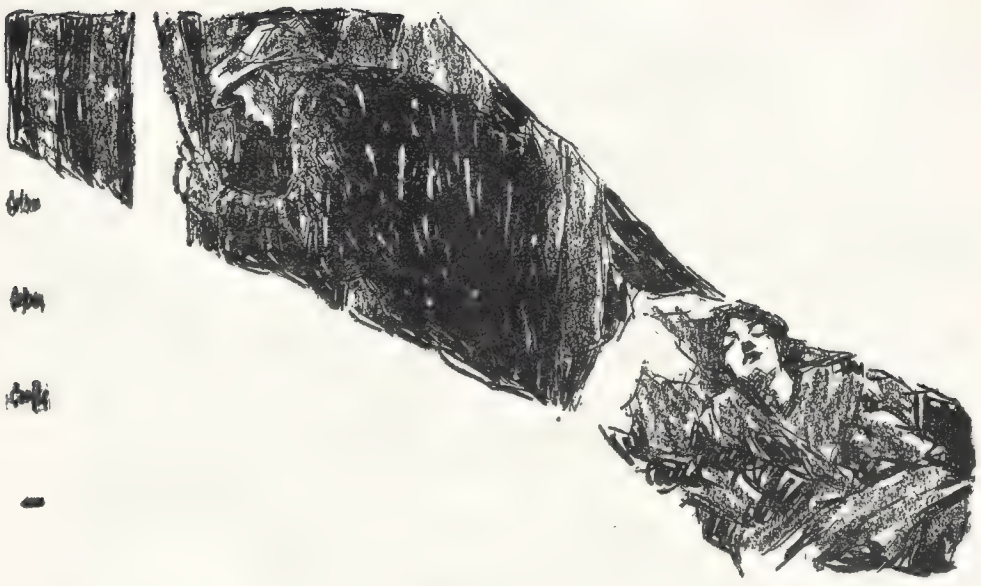
He looked at me without nodding, and I noticed that there was a flicker of red in the whites of his eyes.

"You allee samee execlutioner for Fate," he singsonged, "I allee samee deputy for devil," and, with that, his hand plunged into his sleeve and drew out—a long, legal-looking document. It was the quitclaim deed for the homestead, properly signed and acknowledged by Ed Boswell. In the upper corner was a spatter or two of blood.

Gravely I bowed to the devil worshipper and passed the document to the girl.

She took it in dignified silence. It was almost as though the delivery of the deed was a part of some strange ceremonial rite. And well it might be. The Devil's Deputy and the Executioner of Fate had united to right a wrong—and the deed vested a complete record title.

CURSE OF THE KILLERS by Erle Stanley Gardner
A BLACK BARR Story—in an early issue of BLACK MASK



An Hour Before Dawn

By EARL W. and MARION SCOTT

He had crashed out of stir and had a chance at a getaway, but **he wanted to carry with him the feeling of a perfect revenge.**

BAT SLADEN was on his way to get Flint Williams before sailing for Rio on Grease Lubbock's old tramp, the *White Witch,* an hour before dawn.

There were two reasons why he was willing to chance it. Detective Flint Williams had dusted Bat's heels for three years, knowing, but unable to prove that Bat had got Curly Daws, the kid that Williams had been training to work with him.

Williams' vicious tenacity had resulted in two stretches for Bat. The first he had completed according to contract. The second he had successfully terminated a week ago by double-crossing old Skipper Sneed, who engaged in the lucrative though hardly commendable business of selling dope to inmates of the Big House.

The net results of placing information in just the right quarter were the promotion of a certain guard, a chance to fade for Bat, and a warrant out for old Skipper Sneed with a stretch for the rest of his days his portion when found.

Once outside, it was distinctly up to Bat to take care of himself. He knew well enough he should lay low until the hour shortly before the dawn when the *White Witch* sailed; but the combined pull of revenge and fear had proved too much for his discretion. Briefly, he knew that as long as the grim officer lived, he, Bat Sladen, would be in danger.

Bat Sladen was a lone wolf, yet he had used the Gray Moll as the unconscious medium through which Williams should be baited to Charlie Wong's opium den in the alley off Dermont Street, toward which he was now heading.

Bat remembered the Gray Moll well

enough. It had been the sight of her between red curtains at Charlie Wong's place that had given him his first idea as to Flint Williams.

He was careful that she did not suspect he recognized her, that he remembered the time nearly ten years back when Flint Williams had been fool enough to try and help her, send her to school, give her a chance. Bat's maimed lip had curled at sight of her stretched out behind the curtains, eyes half closed, the stem of a pipe between her red lips. Reform—Hell!

Still Bat knew she cherished a strong liking for Williams. She often tipped him off as to some impending criminal activity, and he gambled on the chance that she would convey to the detective his description and habit of visiting the den.

Bat had guessed right. After three guarded visits to Charlie Wong's it had reached his ears by a circuitous underground route that Flint Williams was wise to his midnight hang-out and was coming to get him the next night.

Bat had grinned and licked his torn lip. He did not under-estimate his man, yet he knew that nothing less than the promise of his own capture would bring Williams to the place of Charlie Wong, a sworn enemy.

The cause of the feud between the silent, gray man-hunter and the smiling, snaky Oriental was a profound secret, which even the efficient intelligence system of the well-organized underworld failed to uncover.

Yet all knew it existed, crooks and bulls, gangsters and police heads, gunmen and dicks. It was just a thing to be accepted like the Sullivan Law or a shake-up at headquarters, not exactly understood, but recognized. And on the fact of its existence Bat was playing one of his trump cards.

His desire to frame Charlie Wong was secondary. On general principles he hated yellow men. To be specific, Charlie Wong had had a hand in Bat's first conviction. His sleek, smiling testimony had sent Bat up for eighteen months. Yes, decidedly Charlie Wong needed paying off. But of more importance was the matter of alibi; and to complete his all-trump hand he was going to use Nippy Blount. There were reasons. There always were when Bat did anything.

First off, Nippy was a respected stoolie, if such a thing as a stoolie can be said to be respected. The police believed what Nippy told them with fewer reservations than usually clouded their acceptance of stool-pigeon dope.

Secondly, and equally important, Nippy feared Bat with a cringing, soul-saturating fear that literally dissolved his vitals. He would do what Bat said, tell the story Bat gave him, and he would stick to it.

It would be Nippy seated in a far corner who would testify to seeing Flint Williams come in the curtained door, draw his gun as Charlie Wong advanced toward him. It would be Nippy who would swear that in the exchange of low words which he naturally would not catch, Williams had gone down under the bullet from Charlie's gun.

Let Charlie curse in three languages and six dialects, let him swear that Bat Sladen had been there, let his attorneys bring up the old quarrel between Williams and the escaped con, let them point out that the gun flung in the corner had no fingerprints. Nippy would stick to his story, Charlie would likely burn for the murder of Williams, and Bat would be speeding gaily o'er the sparkling waves to his Rio, beloved of earlier, happier days.

Linder Street which led into Dermont, was dark, cold and uninviting but Bat welcomed its windy length of desertion. Instinctively he clung to the shadows, deadly purpose in his swift, slouching gait.

He was reviewing for the last time the coming affair at Charlie Wong's. For fifty-six hours he had thought of nothing else and he was still unable to find a flaw.

Williams would come in through the curtained door. Charlie Wong would certainly step forward to meet him. Then he, Bat, from the safety of a properly selected booth, would fire and fade by the window into the shadowy length of the rear alley, before the startled Oriental or the drugged denizens of the place could more than stir. After that it would be up to Nippy and Nippy would not fail him. Bat felt satisfied and wisely refrained from dwelling on details of a plot he considered already perfect.

He jerked suddenly out of his slouching amble and flattened against a building. Somewhere in the windy darkness ahead, something stirred. Quick suspicions flared in his mind.

Williams waiting for him? Williams too wise to walk into the trap? Impossible; no one else knew his hide-out or just how he got to Charlie's place. Then without apparent reason he thought of Skipper Sneed.

He crouched lower, hand caressing the handle of his automatic. If it was the asthmatic old devil—the shadow grew clearer, took the shape of a man. A car skirting a distant corner flashed a thin beam of light and Bat saw the bowed shoulders, the long white hair, the trembling hands of the man he had sold out to buy his own freedom.

Oddly enough cold terror gripped Bat. He shivered and clenched his teeth to keep them from chattering. Why fear this old has-been, engaged in the vilest traffic possible, selling dope to prisoned men, eating them up to fill his own pockets? Then the terror gripped him again.

Sneed was stumbling along mumbling to himself, washing his dry bony hands. He passed so close that Bat could smell the whiskey on him. He was talking to himself—

"Bat Sladen, dirty double-crossing snake, sold me out, set the bulls on me, send me up for life, would he? I'll get him, get Bat Sladen, get him right, and send him to burn if I have to die to do it."

Bat held his breath and checked his desire to croak the old whiner then and there. Why, the old fool was crazy, driven clean nutty by the knowledge that the police were after him. Instead of engineering a getaway he was wandering the streets, snivelling and breathing threats against Bat Sladen.

The bent figure passed on, turned a corner, muttered imprecations dying away. Get Bat Sladen would he? Send him to burn if he had to die to do it? Well, he'd have to. Bat cursed himself for letting the old man go, then he straightened, jerked his cap lower and slouched on. He had bigger game than Skipper Sneed. Little he had to fear from him.

He paused a moment before dodging down the narrow canyon of alley off Dermont Street, breathing deeply, collecting his forces for the work ahead. That encounter with the Skipper had somehow upset him. Then he turned sharply, stumbled down a short flight of lumpy stone stairs, lifted a broken piece of brick apparently tossed into the doorway corner, and pressed a hidden bell four times, with his foot.

A wicket opened and a Chinaman with a face like a withered apple scanned him, then the door swung back and he entered. Eyes flashed like lightning over the room. Everything jake so far. He could see through the curtains into all the booths, recognize the familiar faces of the sleepers, the groggy-eyed smokers. Williams hadn't planted anything yet.

He nodded briefly at Charlie as he advanced smiling, then turned to the booth he had reserved for his purpose, the one directly to the left of the door Williams must enter, the one with the window opening on the alley.

As he jerked back the curtains he stopped with a curse. Sprawled gracefully over the scattered cushions lay the Gray Moll. She smiled at him from

heavy eyes and motioned vaguely with a white hand.

"Hello, ol' scout, si' down; si' down and be friendly."

Bat scowled and half turned to call Charlie. She was plainly drunk. Then he stopped. What Bat wanted was to attract as little attention as possible. In her condition she'd make a row if he had her put out. Let her stay, she was too far gone to see anything, already her eyes were closing, her breathing heavy; the still smoking cigarette fell from between her fingers, her head drooped.

Bat sat down on a low stool, gun ready. The place was still, except for an occasional groan, a tipsy laugh, a sobbing cry. Cautiously he parted the curtains and nodded with satisfaction. Nippy was there; the stage was set.

He tensed, heart pounding. A faint ring, another, four short, demanding tingles. It must be Williams pressing the hidden bell in the lumpy doorway.

Bat stepped over the unconscious girl and opened the window. She did not stir.

The door was opening, Charlie looking up expectantly, the curtains moving. A moment of almost unbearable suspense and Flint Williams stepped into the room.

Bat forced the twitching trigger finger to control. No hurry. He had his man, but Charlie must act his unconscious part first. He was coming slowly across the room, his yellow face a waxen mask, unreadable as the face of the grotesque idol he cherished.

Flint Williams stood like a statue, tall, grim, gray, hands hanging easily. Bat caught the flash of the heavy signet ring he remembered so well.

The Gray Moll stirred and groaned. With a movement so swift the eyes could scarcely follow, Williams leaped to the left, crouched down out of range from the booth where Bat waited. His words, crackling like hail, ripped the silence of the room.

"Outside, Sladen; got you covered!"

At the same moment something caught Bat from behind, a soft, lithe body that writhed long arms about him, tangled slippered feet through his wide-braced legs, dragged him downward with the fierceness and seeming strength of a mountain cat.

Bat fired through the curtain, then doubled so suddenly the girl went hurtling over his head to fall with a sharp cry against the heavy metal curtain pole. He kicked her viciously, gun spattering, the curtains were torn apart, Williams stood between them.

Bat dropped to the floor, wriggled between the wide spread legs, crushing his heavy shoe into the face of the unconscious girl, straightening suddenly so that Williams, thrown off his balance, crashed down, dragging the curtains with him.

Bat's gun snapped twice, shattering light bulbs. He jerked a second from a shoulder-holster, and poured bullets into the darkness and the writhing mass of torn curtains at his feet.

Stumbling over huddled forms on the floor he raced for the door. As he fumbled for the knob, long nailed fingers closed around his wrist. He snapped the automatic. It clicked flatly. Empty. He pounded savagely at the stringy body of the silk robed Chinaman. The fumes of the place had a sudden deadliness.

Around him drugged sleepers stirred and moaned. Devastating fury blinded him; a growing frenzy to escape robbed him of his usual cool cunning. His fingers closed on a throat, sunk into the stringy cords, held while the hot heavy air, the choked moaning made his brain reel; then the man relaxed.

He smashed brutal blows at the head that continued to snap back soggily until realizing the energy he was wasting on a dead man he dropped the limp body, found the door knob, was up the stairs and into the street.

Silence, darkness, wind sighing mournfully past empty buildings, a cringing dog at his feet. No humans,

no police. He brushed the tumbled hair from aching eyes.

In that moment when Williams had leaped, and the arms of the Gray Moll had closed around him, Bat Sladen's demoralization had been accomplished.

Gone in a choked breath was his splendid plan of revenge, his elaborate structure of murder. Crouching now in the doorway's shadows, he was obsessed with one thought, escape—escape—get away—break through the web that Williams had likely spread for him, fight off the closing cordon of the law he hated, that would send him back to the Big House, send him to burn for the murder of Charlie Wong, maybe for that of the girl.

Fantastically the words of crazed old man Sneed came back to him—"I'll get him, send him to burn—"

Well, Sneed had nothing to do with this. It was Williams and his cunning which had outmatched the crook's.

Cursing over the split second he had lingered there, fighting for control, he turned to dash into heavy blackness, when, with a stuttering roar, five motorcycles slowed for the turn and swept into the alley's darkness.

Bat had scarcely time to crouch behind an ash can as the rider cops dashed up. Like automatons four of them leaped down, kicked the bike supports under the rear wheels and were down the den's entrance. The fifth man, nearest Bat's hiding place, propped his machine with an extended leg, peering curiously down the stone steps, motor still running.

Bat leaped, brought his empty gat against the man's ear and the officer pitched forward. Like some live thing the machine hopped and whirred, Bat crouching above it, bringing it upright with a mighty tug, reversing it in the blind alley, bumping across the rough cobblestones toward the entrance, just as pandemonium broke loose behind him.

A fleeting glance showed him the entrance to Charlie's place vomiting cops and Orientals. A bullet nicked his ear as he swung into Dermont Street. A roar answered his wrist twist at the throttle. Answering mutters from the alley told of quick pursuit.

Swerving into Linder, he scudded dockward, veered again on to Blakely Avenue, back into Dock Street, in vain trying to bewilder his pursuers who were gaining steadily, knowing their machines, experienced riders cutting his every turn.

Once more Bat swung into a side street, buckled a corner to crash into a cruising taxi, hurtled wide, rolled over, smashing his head against the curb. For just a moment things went black, then, staggering to his feet, he leaped the piled up wreckage just as the officers circled the taxi.

Bullets pattered warning as he plunged into the darkness of an alley. Breathless, weak from the head blow, Bat dropped behind a jumble of boxes. He was risking everything for that second's breath.

His searching eyes caught the dark loom of a fire escape. He was up, the crazy boxes tumbling and rolling beneath his feet. Sudden light at the alley's entrance, shouts, hoarse commands. He jerked at the suspended steel ladder; the weight-balanced end swinging down.

For the moment the upward movement was counteracted by the downward as Bat swarmed up. Yellow splotches of flame pierced the gloom.

Thudding of bullets in the crumbly brick, lead ricochetting from the steel railings, tearing his clothes, searing his flesh, then at the third landing an open window.

Choking, half sobbing, Bat tumbled in to land squarely in the middle of a bed. He yanked the window down and paused, panting. There was the sudden feel of a clammy hand at his face. He squirmed back, breath choking in his lungs, then the petulant voice of a sick man—

"Eddie, is that you, Eddie? Water—Eddie—I'm dying—"

Bat squealed in sudden terror; that whining voice, could it be Sneed's? He fought away as from pestilence, tumbled to the floor to sprawl over a chair. Had he landed in Sneed's room? Then hurrying figures blotted out the dim light of the window. One paused. A flash pierced the room's darkness, picked out the tossing figure on the bed. Even in his danger Bat gasped in relief. The sick man was not Sneed; then light dazzled his eyes.

He cringed at sound of the shrill whistle, but the light had shown him the door. As the window came up he pounced on the knob. It was locked and the key was missing. Bat sobbed as he flailed at the flimsy panels with a rickety chair.

"The sky, Bat; yer covered!"

He whirled to stare into a steady stream of light, blinked and lowered the raised chair. As it crossed his face he pitched it into that gleaming eye and dropped. The orange spurt of flame darted ceilingward. Bat laughed as he tackled the man's legs. That warning whistle would give him slight respite.

As the two forms crashed down, light filled the room following the snap of the switch. The big policeman rolled over, flopping the slighter man beneath him, then Bat's eyes widened. Tottering above them was the emaciated form of the sick man.

Bat caught the gleam of frenzy in his eyes, saw the flash of a heavy cane in his hand, heard the screeched words—"You're killing my Eddie." Then the thud of heavy wood against the policeman's skull.

The fingers at his throat relaxed. With a heave Bat sprang up, snapped off the light, catching from the tail of his eye the sick man pitching to the floor.

The second blow of the chair demolished the panel. Reaching through, Bat unlocked the door, slipped out, relocked it, threw the key away and dashed along the dark hall and down.

His brain was still whirling crazily from the hectic rush of events since he stumbled up the stairs and into the alley outside Charlie Wong's place. He had been so near destruction a dozen times in those mad moments that he was unable to appreciate any seeming escape, nor was he foolish enough to count himself out of the woods.

The locked door would hold them up a few minutes, that was all. If it gave him time to find an exit, throw them off his direct trail he might have a chance to make the dock and the *White Witch.*

Panting, weak from the chase, he sucked a long draught of stale air into his lungs. He dared not pause. Then he rounded a second corner and stopped at the sight of the blue-coated form drowsing in the chair tilted against the wall.

Bat crouched low, as he started forward, a whine of helpless fury in his throat. The big officer roused suddenly.

"Not so fast, my friend; where's the fire?"

The sick terror at Bat's throat relaxed. This bull was here for some other purpose.

"Upstairs, round second corner, far end of hall, sick man's room, what's the row here?"

The policeman jerked a thumb toward the closed door at his shoulder.

"Been a killin' in there! Fire, eh? That's bad." He rose lumberingly.

Bat tossed a few words after him—"Got to get to a phone," and clambered down the stairs. He felt like laughing, shouting, dancing. Running into a bull like that, right into his arms, Bat Sladen, a much wanted man, and being able to get away. It argued well, it was a favorable sign.

It was certain they'd be at the front door. He'd have to find another exit. On the second landing he turned and raced for the rear of the building. A red light glowed over a window at the

hall's end. He jerked up the sash and was looking into another darkened alley, a fire escape angling down the wall.

He was out, clawing down the thing. The sounds of pursuit came faintly, slamming of doors, pound of heavy feet. Bat laughed crazily. Fooled 'em, given 'em the slip—

His nerves shrieked a warning—too late. Hands seized him, dragged him to the ground. Helpless for the moment Bat relaxed in the other's arms. He could do no more.

A heavy Irish voice permeated his dazed mind. "This ain't no public thoro'fare, just a little private entrance, this fire escape, since the croaking up there."

He was dragging out a flashlight, holding Bat securely with one big hand.

Bat roused. "Who's croaked?" he asked dully not that he cared much.

"Old gent on the fifth floor. Gonna' be easy though. We got the guy's name; old man roused up long enough to tell us, it won't be long now—"

Through Bat's reeling brain came the stab of a horrible idea. Like a man in a dream he looked around him, recognized faintly the alley, the building.

"Who—who—was croaked?"

The officer shot on his flash, took one look at Bat, lifted his whistle to his lips and shrilled sharply.

"Old Skipper Sneed the Dope King. Pipe, though; he give us the guy's name—"

"Who—croaked—him?" There were odd lights flashing before Bat's eyes. He was remembering a quavering old voice chanting something about—"I'll send him to burn if I have to die to do it."

Through his fogged consciousness he made out hurrying figures at the alley's mouth. His hands went moist—that foremost man, tall, thin, a gleam of white bandages—yes, it was Williams, and here so soon.

The policeman called to him: "Got him all right and he has the nerve to ask who Sneed said bumped him off."

Bat met the steely eyes beneath the bandages.

"That's easy," Flint Williams answered. "Guy that just crashed out of stir—Bat Sladen. The Gray Moll also slipped over the line. Too bad you can only pay for one killing, Bat."

Bat felt cold steel on his wrists. Oddly enough he was thinking not of Skipper Sneed, or the Gray Moll, but of Curly Daws.

The Wooing of Shah-Layah

By HENRY WALLACE PHILLIPS

A little matter of private business attended to—all good and proper.

"JACK came to the ranch," said Red Saunders, "a wild lad, but he had a good heart in him.

"The first time he got paid off, he went to town and repealed the Great Law of Gravitation. Then he made the earth spin around the other way for a while, and returned to us, a little marred in personal appearance, considerable tired, thoroughly broke and entirely happy.

"Nobody else was much hurt, neither. All felt that they had attended a time that perhaps was not as brilliant as some times, nor as dead hard as other times, but that it was the kind of a time which couldn't well be beat.

"Jack should have been reasonable, and stopped there—but no! He got the notion that he was the pipeline that attended to all the whiskey in Dakota, and when he operated on them principles it became necessary to tie him. He was onrestful, even when tied. He upsot the cot on top of himself and kind of hunched along the floor like a cross between a four-legged catarpillar and a mud-turkle. He hollered some, too. He *did* holler. You see, he thought there was a bunch of Uncapapas had caught him. That's the reason he hollered. I never saw the man yet that really liked to get Uncapa-Sioux mixed up with his system. And he told me afterward there was just slathers and oodles and plenty of big Injuns.

"He come out of this weak but wary. He took me to one side, so to speak, and he says:

"'Now, Red, I've done this business to a fare-ye-well. I'm through. I'm going to stick in the country, save my money, and keep sober. I'm going to eat plain food, and forget all about the bright lights. I think I shall also raise a few whiskers, and settle up. About the last, I'm not so sure, but the first goes as she lays and you can slide your stack on top of that bet.'

"'Good!' says I. 'Stay with her, Jack. If there's anything I do better than something else, it's to give or endorse good advice.'

"'I need no givers nor endorsers on my little note,' says Jack. 'I'm a Killy-lu bird whose tune ain't so very high-operatical, but I can hold right to my bit, like an alligator to the hind leg of a fat pickaninny.'

"He did.

"You couldn't force a drink of whiskey into that man with a diamond drill. But he never got so respectable it hurt your feelings. He was content with staying sober his own self, and letting you do as you please with yours.

"Bimeby, some of our Oregon half-breeds started for home. That's the kind of horse that knows his way home, and ain't a mite discouraged because home is several thousand miles away. He just goes for home, one foot after another, and he's that thorough, if you don't get busy ketching him, first thing you know, he is home, and you ain't. It's some little trip from North Dakota to Oregon, so Johnny-on-the-spot for the Ranch boss, when the Oregon half-breed nickers 'Home, Sweet Home.'

"Well, Jack was the steady boy, now; so the boss gives him a dandy pair of ponies, his blankets and his grub, and tells him to chase the sun until he's interrupted by about eighty Oregon half-breeds. When you're chasing them brutes, you've got the same kind of sailing orders the good Lord gave Christopher Columbus. 'Get a move on, pard, and keep it moving.'

"So away goes Jack, just as the sun winked at Captain Smith's Butte—out in the open he goes. Miles of open—right, left, forward, back and up in the air. 'Go as far as you durn please and don't turn back then, unless you want to.' He rides right out of sight in front of your eyes, as we all used to in the old days. Yes, you see him, a man and a horse—a blot—a speck—and nothing! Still barrels of landscape in front of where he left the picture at that.

"Mr. Jack rides to his fortune, but he didn't know that. Every blame little thing you do means so much, if you stopped to think of it, you wouldn't do it. You just back-track a bit on your own trail. See how quick you'll get to saying: 'If I hadn't done this, I'd 'a' been that.' And you believe it, too! that's the funny part.

"Speaking of fortune, I meant to say that Jack had no earthly use for women. I judged from scant remarks he made some lady had treated him like she hadn't ought to in bygone days.

"Jack was fearful old—almost twenty-three. You don't get any older than that. You spend twenty-three years getting old, and the next twenty-three getting over it.

"So, anyhow, Jack's got no notion at all of the female sect. He says what started the Devil on his downward path was that the Old Boy happened into the Garden of Eden and Eve took him into camp. According to Jack, Mr. John H. Devilkins had the idea of turning the place into a summer resort and selling building lots at a handsome profit, but Eve fed Adam the apple, and poor old Mr. Devil a bunch of taffy, laid the blame all on the snake, and pulled out of the mess with the same sweet, innocent smile she wore when she first struck the premises, while Adam got a life sentence to hard labor and John H. went to Hell entirely.

"I believe Daly was prejudiced, and I can't see who they were going to sell

the lots to, but there are parts of the story that appeal to the thoughtful thinker.

"As I was saying, Jack was no wild enthusiast about the ladies. He thought they was all right in their place, but I'm too gol-darn much of a gentleman to even let myself suspect where that place was.

"And now, see him pushing right into one of these love affairs as fast as a good horse can carry him at a moderate gait. That's it; that's it; you can think all you like about women, but there ain't anything you're going to do about it. They broke up the Garden of Eden; they incite to such actions as make the Ten Commandments look like a smart child's prize sum in fractions. There ain't an unhappy home, scarcely anywhere, but what there's a woman in it; as for importance in the world, they ain't any. Just take a look at the names of great men in history—do you find any women there? You do not.

"Yet you'll go to work and marry one of them, just the same; any quantity of men will, and there you are.

"God created man, but woman, she just happened along. I'm telling you this on the quiet. This ain't the way I talk to ladies myself. Because in spite of all their faults, and my faults, and all the faults of everything, I like 'em—as a beverage, anyhow. But I don't seem to get the habit regular.

"The first day Jack rode his sixty miles, plumb straight for the sky-line. And the next day he did the mate to it on his lead cayuse. And the next day he camped at the Grindstone Buttes, while the sun went down in gold and gorgeousness.

"There was millions of miles of prairie shining away in the last light, and only God and Jack Daly to look at it.

"Jack makes his little fire of weeds, cooks up his coffee and bacon, very much pleased with the company he's in.

"Then he clears away the clutter, rolls him a cigarette, puts his back agin' a warm rock, and settles down for a good old-fashioned think. It's so quiet and undisturbing when you're out in the clear, you really can think. No little noises mussing your mind. A cigar-store Injun could do some plain thinking that way.

"Bimeby, tho', he hears something—very clear—clear as anything, and very far—a tiny drumming.

"Overhead was shifting and changing, from beauty to beauty. The little young moon hung her silver hook in the sky, and a big star, like a splinter knocked off, blazed away below it. And every time you filled your lungs, you got a jump of real, genuine Dakota fresh air.

"That air never was used before by man nor beast. You could feel it trickling clean down to your toes; when the wind blows it into you over the sweet tops of the prairie grasses, you want to get right up and do something—holler you're alive, anyhow.

"So, old Jack, filled up with grub and tobacco and fresh air, would ha' bet anybody anything that life was worth living. And that drumming comes closer—clatter—clum—clatter—clum, a pony cantering his way.

"Now, in those days, if you had a friend, he was blood of your blood; you'd stand at his back till his belly caved in, or you'd share his last cent with him, or do anything that any gentleman's pleased to mention. And if you had an enemy, you hated him, proper. You couldn't confine yourself to whispering bad names about him; you had to take a meat-axe, and smack him with it, here, there and everywhere, until he was convinced you didn't like him.

"So 'twas between Red and White. Many's the friendship between white man and Injun as strong as wire-rope; but generally they hated each other promiscuous and furious, and didn't care a damn who knew it.

"So, Jack, knowing nothing but an Injun could be pulling toward him, unlimbered his .44, ready to shoot first

and fast, and waited for the stranger to come up.

"'Hands, up!' says he, and the stranger cut the skyline with his mitts. You don't argue out there. A gentleman tells you to do something, and you do it, unless you're quite unusual on the draw. If the gentleman wasn't prepared to back his little request, he just wouldn't say nothing at all. That's the kind of a country I like. You can't scarcely tell the difference between talking and acting.

"'Get off'n that horse,' says Jack. The stranger swung loose and waited. You see, we never used to mind about an Injun's not being able to talk English. They're like the badger that climbed the tree—they can all talk English when they have to.

"Well, it was a slim slip of a boy, with a feather in his hair. He stood there with his hands up, like he prayed; fearing, but brave.

"Jack, as I said, was kind-hearted. 'Well, Son,' says he, 'how? What you doing in these parts? Answer right, quick and pleasant, and you can put your little patties down again.'

"'I come from the Mussel shell,' says the Injun. 'I ride four days—four nights. I ride away from bad men—I go to my uncle, Ta-tonkah-wit-kote-ko, down in the Ee yah-wahga-gahpi Wak-palah.'

"Jack stares at him.

"'Crazy Bull ain't got any nephews—what you talking about?' says he.

"The Injun looked at him with smiling eyes.

"'I no nephew,' says she. 'I am girl.'

"'! ! . . ! !—' says Jack, 'I mean the Hell you are—that is to say, how are you, anyhow? Pleased to meet you.'

"He steps toward her with his hand out, so mixed up and circumflabbergasted he trips up over his own feet.

"'Can I take hands down?' she asks him, just tilting her head a bit to one side. A good deal of Jack's circulation got busy in his face. He was not stuck on himself for holding up a girl.

"'Say!' he pleads. 'Chuck that in the discard, will you? If you and me is goin' to be any kind of friends at all, start it by letting my little gunplay drift into the distance.'

"'All right!' says she, and laughs out.

"They shook hands—she, so slim and dark and soople-mooving, and him as solid a chunk of a man as ever broke a bronco's bad heart. A yaller mane on him like a healthy young lion, blue eyes, pale again' his tanned hide, and built as four-square as a chimbley.

"And now it was just like the old Garden of Eden once more. Here was Jack Daly, Shah-Layah and God—all nice people, with good intentions—but Mr. John H. Devilkins, with his trained serpent was absent from the occasion. Here I wish to make a remark about this woman-hating business: You can hate 'em wholesale, yet get fearful tangled up on a piece of sample goods.

"From the first minute he seen her with her hands black again the blazing sky, Shah-Layah was the sign of the cross to Jack Daly. And, if he'd fished the world with a scap-net, he couldn't 'a' struck another such mate.

"Shah-layah had been taken into a white family, and given some of the good side of the white man's training; then the people died, and she got a look at the bad side. Now, you don't lead persons like Shah-Layah astray. Oh, no! Never, *Wanitchee,* nit, not any. Either they go astray on the hop-skip and jump, eat-drink-and-be-merry principle, or they muss the landscape with the would-be leaders.

"Shah-Layah shot two round and effective holes into one gent that bothered her, grabbed a cayuse, and pulled out.

"I am a large man, a strong man; and I'll speak crossly to the person who says I'm easily scairt, but you'll kindly excuse me from trying to lead any lady astray, when the aforesaid lady ain't got notions that way. Old man Shakespeare says the same thing. And when he and I both say the same thing, one of us is right—certain.

"Well, Jack and Shah-Layah goes hunting Oregons together. And I don't have to be told, to realize what poor modest Jack suffered when it came time to make camp. Women don't fuss over them things. If they like a man, all he does is O. K.—except, of course, for a little talk to keep him in his place—and if they don't like him, he can't call the turn, spot nor color.

"But, Jack, he's full of proprieties and notions. For an old hen, give me a young cowpuncher.

"The girl's common sense tore the nonsense out of the situation. One look at Jack's eyes, and she knew she was up again' the kind of little boy who wouldn't take advantage of her defenseless condition, no matter what provocation she gave him.

"And she was a good girl; not one of your double-crossing, inside-outside, I-didn't-mean-it — unhand-me-villain — come-again, how-dare-you — ain't-it-lovely-this-evening female Chinese puzzles that you lose when you get the answer, but the kind that loves her man; fights for her man; who respects God, but prefers her man for steady company —and, as for any other he-person getting mixed in her social duties, she'd bite his damned head off at the first shy—

"Them girls haven't got morals—they've got one moral—and that one moral is one man. May the breed increase. So many of the ladies are so darn versatile.

"Yes, Shah-Layah wasn't worried. She took her blankets and rolled up real comfortable against Jack, while he blushed himself asleep.

"And in the morning, when the curlews and the meadow larks was whistling how pleased they were with everything, and the first big heave of prairie wind whispered through the grasses, a familiar heartening smell comes to Jack's nose, and he wakes up sudden, and thinks he must have gone to Heaven in the night, for there's breakfast, all ready —flap-jacks, smoking hot—bacon and fried bread, and the lovely, lovely coffee bubbling right out of the pot in its enthusiasm.

"And there was Shah-Layah, slim, clean and fitting the landscape to an allspice.

"She looked mighty good to Jack Daly. When she flashed her eyes and little white teeth at him, in 'good morning,' Jack didn't hate her a particle.

"He stammered out something about her not bothering with the work, but she disdained that kind of drivel.

"'What Squaw good for?' says she. She looked at him and held up her finger.

"'I work for my man,' she says.

"Some fellows want to do all the hunting where women are concerned, and like the game to be shy. Others don't. That's Jack. He never rated himself much; if the woman didn't make it plain to him, it never would occur to him she liked him.

"Now he was right pleased. Shah-Layah was a pretty person, as well as being useful. She stepped as light as an antelope, and she had that hair-trigger readiness that makes a cat so interesting, even if he's only sauntering along the grass. Moreover, her little body was shapely, and her long, slim Injun face very high-looking and good-looking. Dandy eyes—handsome, and met you like a hand-shake—or a smash with a fist according to her feelings.

"Jack Daly's heart took a big jump when she told him so plain what she felt for him. I wonder he didn't say, 'This is so sudden.'

"Well, they took after the half-breeds, and they caught the half-breeds. When a man marries the ordinary woman, he usually doubles his uselessness, but when he's pardners with an Injun girl, he goes up 300 per cent as a handy man.

"They started the horses home—the best friends that ever split grub. And she'd smoke a cigarette or two in the evening with him, just to be sociable. And they talked about everything, because Shah-Layah knew more English than she let on, as all Injuns do. What a ride they had! And what a chance to

know each other! The average man don't get a great deal of information about his girl, when he's courting her. Throw him out on the prairie with her, alone, for two weeks, and then let's see if we hear wedding bells in the distance, or the sound of footsteps vanishing rapidly!

"All the damned nonsense gets fried out of it, when you're with a person morning, noon and night, and no amusements handy, but your own thinking.

"Still, something puzzled Shah-Layah, and at times, she'd chuck a quick look at her man, as if she couldn't make him out, nohow. She couldn't get the play straight to save her. So she set her wits to work.

"Then, of course, she got the answer, like any person, who'll take the trouble to go after it. Yes, it was all perfectly clear, so Shah-Layah rummaged in her war-sack, where she kept her extra clothes and girl treasures, and brought out something her white foster-mother had left, when she died.

"The next morning, the sun knew something was up, so he washed his face particular nice and clean and was ready on the minute. And all the little prairie dogs put their heads together, and whispered, and even two coyotes hung around a far-off butte and waited.

"High, high in the air—out of sight, altogether, an eagle screamed—just a voice in the big emptiness, and Shah-Layah took Jack's hand in hers, and with the other hand she placed the white mother's heirloom within his.

"It was a wedding-ring.

"Jack looked at her, and he looked at the ring. And as Providence, in its mercy, had given him spots in his head that were not as thick as the other spots, he ketches the idea. And he looked around him. It was morning, coming in like a sea—everything swept and cleaned and dusted, ready for a new start.

"All the little prairie dogs stood at attention, with their little paws hanging down. Ma and Pa Coyote nodded their heads and thought what awful fools humans were after all. It took 'em years to learn the first facts in the primer.

"And then something further came to Jack Daly as he looked at his bride's dear little face; it struck him, warm as a fire, how much nicer and cleaner she had planned her wedding, than if they had advertised private matters before a church full of people. All the Maiden Aunt-Old Hen in his makeup died a sudden death. And a big man's tenderness for the woman that was to be flesh of his flesh took the place of it.

"He kissed her, and turned her so they both faced the early sun. Then Jack raised his head and put the matter up to the Boss—what's the sense of fooling with servants, anyhow?

"'God,' says he, 'I take this woman for my wedded wife. There ain't a reason agin it, as You know Yourself, and I'm proud to state.' He says to her, 'You say the same!'

"So she raised her head and said, 'God, he's my man, forever.'

"He put the ring on her finger. 'I ain't got much, but it's yours, Shah-Layah,' says he. And they kissed each other.

"'Hooray!' says the sun and blazed away his best. All the little prairie dogs scuttled to work.

"'Well, that's over,' says Pa and Ma Coyote and beat it. I guess the Boss approved, for they've had as good luck as most people. Even Mr. John H. Devilkins with his justly celebrated serpent remained quietly in the background.

"That is about as good a wedding as ever I heard of; I was darn sorry to learn there was enough of old hen left in Jack to make him go through the church business afterward. Still, of course, we can't cut loose from foolery altogether."

A Moll and Her Man

By ERIKA ZASTROW

A drama of the Underworld.

MAMIE CONNOR stood staring at the door through which they had taken Pete. She stood quite still, hands pressed against her side, while the crowds about her in the court-room pushed this way and that in an effort to get out now that the session was over.

Pete had been the last, achieving the sorry honor of the greatest importance. But then, the Delahanty pearls were no small things to have stolen. When the attorney displayed the famous catch which had been found in Pete's pocket, a thrill had gone through the crowd. The catch was enough to prove Pete's guilt, even though they had found no pearls.

Mamie stood, staring with hot, feverish eyes at the people about her. Women were laughing. Laughing! The girl closed her eyes a moment. Mamie Connor had never, in all her happy, careless life, learned how to pray. So she had not prayed consciously for Pete—just hoped.

Hoped—she felt like laughing herself. As though the law ever opened its octopus hands to let a man free. Snooky had planted the evidence so cleverly. That catch, especially patented for the Delahanty pearls, like no other catch in the world—that had been all the evidence needed. Mamie had known something of this kind would happen, after Pete refused to pull off the safe job for Snooky.

A touch on her arm made her swing around quickly.

"Oh, it's you." Her voice was tired, disillusioned.

The man stood looking down at her, his rather stout, good-humored face, stern. People always belittled Buck's face until they caught sight of his eyes, and then they wondered. He towered

heavily over the slim, taut-strung figure in its tawny finery.

"Sure, it's me, Mamie. Still think Pete's innocent, don't you."

She stared at him angrily. "Think? I know he is, and I know, too, it doesn't matter. When did a jury ever give a man like Pete half a chance? Just because he was sent up once."

Buck thoughtfully took her arm, leading her out of the court-room, now nearly empty, into the street. At a small, secluded lunch-room he stopped.

"Let's feed. Bet you haven't thought of eating for some time."

Mamie started to protest, then a faint sensation made her follow dociley. She couldn't go on, not eating or sleeping. Not for five years, which was the term of Pete's sentence. Five years out of his life—out of her life.

Facing the detective, she did not look at him, but made tiny patterns in the none too clean table covering. Buck ordered, then sat back in his chair, surveying her. A type—sleazy silk stockings, high-heeled cheap slippers, painted lips, bobbed hair. And yet a courageous, loyal girl. He knew more of what her influence had wrought in Pete's life than Mamie realized. Pete had confided in him despairingly just before the sentence was passed.

Buck reached out and covered her nervous, highly polished fingers with his large hand.

"Listen, Mamie, you've got something up your sleeve. You can count me in on it. I'm with you and Pete all the way. I know there was something crooked about this deal they handed him, and though I couldn't prove it in time, I'm not sitting back either. The evidence was strong, but Pete—"

She lifted her heavy lids, her eyes large and dark as pansies in her powdered face.

"Pete was planted—" she whispered.

The detective nodded. "Sure he was. And you know why."

She smiled faintly. "Snooky. He always hated Pete."

"Snooky was sweet on you, too, wasn't he, Mamie."

Her eyes grew more sombre. "Sure. Me and Pete and Snooky always sort of run together when we was kids. The fellows had gangs. Snooky was always getting Pete to do jobs for him and then they found out that Pete could open safes. After that Snooky just hounded him, and once Pete did a big haul. He was sent up then, and Snooky didn't try to get him out. I got tired then and told Pete I didn't want him to try no more of them jobs. I put the cards on the table. So Pete got a regula' pay-envelope job and he liked it, honest, Buck. We was going to get matched and go to the Falls, just like regular folks."

She sighed faintly, her fingers falling to making patterns again. Buck looked at her compassionately.

"Pete wasn't cut out for a crook, Mamie."

"Snooky was always after him to do some big job in a bank and Pete wouldn't. And then Snooky found out about Pete and me and he was mad. He swore to get even with Pete. We was living quiet, not bothering anyone, and the dicks come along and pull Pete in. I knew right away it was Snooky, even if Pete didn't."

Something hard came into her small face. She spoke concisely, grimly.

"I'm out to get Snooky at his own game," she added softly. "Snooky's crazy about me. I'm going to get him."

Buck gazed at her with admiration. "That's the stuff, Mamie. Won't he be suspicious, though?"

She laughed, with a twist of her painted, young mouth. "Ever see a man in love suspicious? I ain't no fool. Snooky'll fall—hard. And then—"

She put out her hand. "I'll get him and the pearls, somehow. I'll prove the law was wrong. I'll—"

A little sob broke from her throat and she turned away from him quickly to hide her tears. Buck patted her shoulder as though she had been a child.

"I'm with you, Mamie. I'm in on

this, and when you get Snooky with the goods, I'll have the men ready to cover your retreat."

PETE knew that No. 12 was trying to signal him. Warily he eyed the guard while his fingers seemed to be busy with pegs and hammer, making the clumsy prison shoes. A feeble ray of sunlight entered through an upper window, illuminating the long table with its rows of busy, silent men.

Six months. Pete's mouth was set grimly, his eyes were dark and tortured. Sometimes Mamie's flower-like face rose between him and the leather, her pansy eyes, her painted, tempting mouth.

"I'll be waiting, Pete. You know that. It won't be so long. I'll earn some money and we'll skip these parts."

Pete's scowl softened. He visioned Mamie alone, for five years, the flowering years of her girlhood. Waiting for him. God, and he had tried to go straight. A fellow didn't have a chance any more, not when he slipped once.

How a man kept thinking in this place. Not allowed to talk. Thought going round and round in a maddening circle. Mamie—and then Snooky. Snooky had those pearls. Snooky was crazy about Mamie. Pete had seen him during the trial, smiling, looking at Mamie. But she could look out for herself. She was waiting for him, Pete. Pete had no God, no faith. Mamie was everything in the world he desired, wanted.

"Us, Pete—we're going straight. You'll get a regular job and we'll get hitched. Live like regular folks, Pete."

He wiped the perspiration from his forehead. The sunlight flickered further along. Day after day like this, watching the sunlight come, advance and fade and then night.

"Say, think this is a resting room? Get the hell to work, there."

Pete started. He seized the hammer and beat viciously upon the leather. Rest-room? It was hell—it was jail. Jail for five years with six months gone. Four and a half years to go. He turned slyly to look at No. 12. At that moment the guard turned to snap at another prisoner, and No. 12 started to talk. He had a small, flexible mouth and the words slipped from its corners almost like a breath. No. 12 was an experienced prisoner, and Pete had learned, during his previous term, to read lips.

"Going to make a break—need you, Pete."

Pete frowned. Freedom? Perhaps. But it was risky—might set him back another year. He didn't dare, had lost his nerve. He and Mamie'd be hounded, followed. Almost imperceptibly he shook his head, his mouth full of pegs.

No. 12 watched him grimly, knowingly. He spoke again when the guard reached the bottom of the table.

"Snooky's got—your skirt—"

For a moment Pete stared. No. 12 smiled, a slow, ugly smile and in that smile lay a world of meaning.

"Slim told me—got a visit—Snooky's got your skirt—"

Pete looked down. There were tiny flecks of blood on his hand where his fingers had closed convulsively over some nails. But he did not feel any pain. Something in his mind seemed on fire, tortured. Snooky and Mamie? Scenes came back, memories. He was in prison, helpless.

Again he looked at No. 12. And the sight of that ugly smile made him mad, ferocious. He leaped from his seat, straight at the man, hands clutching for No. 12's throat. He wanted to beat those words down the man's throat.

"Damn you to hell!"

He caught a glimpse of the mocking gleam in No. 12's eyes and suddenly his hands loosened. He backed away just as the guard came running to him and sat down. No. 12 smiled. He knew that Pete would help in the getaway now.

IT was raining, a drizzly, steady rain that swept the city streets in gray sheets of water, that glittered on the

pavements under the electric lights and beat dolefully on the closed windows of houses.

Down in this section of the city all the houses were shuttered, decrepit and shambling, leering like drunken men dreaming of past glories, whispering of secrets concealed in crumbling walls. The East River, dirty, mysterious, eddied past these wrecks, murmuring, whispering.

It was in such a house, seemingly deserted and left to solitary decay near the river's bank, that Mamie Connor sat this evening opposite Snooky.

The house was quiet save for the rats that gnawed an underground passage to the river and housed in the walls. The rooms had a degree of livability, once one got past the door. Snooky and his gang had purchased the old house and inhabited it. A fortune had often been stored in the old walls, and a murder had been committed in its cellar. Haunted it was, with ghosts and gibbering phantoms of evil deeds. A silent house, but not a dead one.

Mamie and Snooky, however, were now alone with the rain hemming them in. They sat upstairs in Snooky's private den, heavily shuttered and lit by a shaded electric bulb. The walls were rain-streaked, with strips of paper hanging from the corners. A calendar, portraying a plump, half-dressed dancing girl in favor years before, hung on one wall. There were two chairs in the room, a table and a bureau. In the walls was a safe, its location and combination known only to Snooky himself.

He sat now, watching Mamie with something of the look of a hungry yet momentarily satisfied animal. Mamie had accomplished her self-imposed task well.

She had, at first, seemed to avoid Snooky, and yet that very avoidance was so cleverly planned that it invited his pursuit. Presently he was half convinced that his suspicions were groundless. Mamie never spoke of Pete. She hung around with the gang as she always had before she and Pete separated from it; she seemed gay and happy and yet wistful. And in some way, known only to Mamie herself, she made Snooky believe that she regretted her escapade with Pete.

"Gee, Mamie's too good a skirt to hang round waiting for a Dumb Dora like Pete," Doll Richards had once exclaimed. Snooky was also of this conviction.

Then Mamie "vamped" him openly in the manner of the street. She flirted with others of his gang, ignoring him pointedly. She tantalized him with glances, loudly spoken words, mocked him, jeered at him. Like all men, tremendously clever in reading a man's thoughts, Snooky fell easy prey to the female.

He went after her angrily. Mamie seemed gradually to yield to him. After Snooky had drawn on Sly for daring to dance with the girl, the whole street knew that Snooky had framed Pete so that he could have Pete's girl, and that Mamie and Snooky were sweethearts. One or two felt sorry for Pete. But it was not the way of the street to have mercy on the weak and fallen. No one blamed Mamie for her changed affections. Least of all Snooky himself.

It was now six months since Pete's conviction. Mamie was alone with her victim in his private den, and on the table between them lay the Delahanty pearls.

"Yep," she said softly, staring at them fascinated. "Them's pearls, all right. Guess you're on the level with me, Snooky. You're smart, getting them right under her nose, so's to say. I never woulda believed you, if I hadn't seen 'em. I'm sure nuts on pearls."

Snooky kept them in his pudgy, fleshy fingers, smiling at her. "All skirts are. The dame I lifted them from musta had some rich guy going hard to buy them. And now I got 'em for you, Mamie. I allers meant you to have some of 'em."

She nodded, not looking at his perspiring face. The pearls, little goblets

of smooth, shimmering silver, fascinated her. There was blood on those pearls, and sorrow and tears and prison. Mamie shivered a little, then she curved her heavily painted lips into a brilliant smile.

"Gee," she murmured. "Gee, Snooky, you're there. Suppose Pete knew about this."

Artlessly she glanced up at him, so artlessly that not the faintest suspicion stirred in his breast. The very fact that she spoke of Pete lulled any doubt he might have felt. He laughed.

"Thought you an' Pete was pals once. But you're too damned smart to fall for a dumb one like that, ain't you, kid?"

She nodded. "Oh, I did like Pete. I do. But when a girl meets the real thing —" her look was full of meaning. She had not yet dared to take the pearls from his hand to her own. She was waiting, breathlessly, with every nerve tense in her slim body, for Buck's signal. The sound of rats in the walls, a sound with a slight rhythm to distinguish it from the usual sound. Mamie frowned. The rain was beating so on the shutters, perhaps she wouldn't hear the signal. Beads of perspiration stood on her forehead under her clustering curls.

She smiled, letting her fingers glide over the pearls, touching his wrist, his palm.

"Goin' ter give me some, Snooky? Gee, I'd like 'em all."

Her touch was magnetic. Snooky's eyes, half hidden in rolls of flesh, glittered, sweeping her face, her bared throat, her slim body. He was perfectly safe—alone in his own house with a locked door between him and interruptions. She had been flirting with him long enough now, with the pearls before her, there could be no other excuse.

"Say, kid, you've got me—Mamie—" he drew his chair closer to hers. "Listen, Mamie, ain't I done everything? Even the pearls? You're the only one knows about 'em. If a cop smelled them ten miles around I'd be a goner tonight. I ain't dared to hock one—not in this town. We'll go away, Mamie—"

Her fingers closed over his hand. What was that—a sound? Different from the sounds she had been hearing—Buck surely? Quickly she turned to Snooky, throwing all her allure, all her promise in her eyes as they met his.

"This old place is full of rats," she murmured. "Gosh, Snooky, I'm scared of them—"

Before his sudden flaring look, her eyes closed, her throat quivered. He was close to her now, touching her, his lips seeking hers with a ferocious, hungry desire. And as they did so, Mamie's fingers caught the pearls from his loose grasp. She clenched them close to her panting bosom, enduring Snooky's kiss a moment longer. Then, with a cry, she broke from him, backing against the wall, one hand across her lips—

"Snooky—I—"

She waited, panting. Why didn't Buck come? Had she mistaken the signal? Was she still alone in the house with Snooky and that hungry look of desire, his wet lips and clutching hands? Suppose Buck didn't come — suppose something had happened— Her eyes dilated.

"No—" she cried suddenly, straining her face away from his. "Oh, no—no—"

Even as she spoke there came the sound of a muffled explosion. The door swung open on creaking hinges and a cloud of smoke entered the room. A man stood there. His face was dusty and streaked with dried blood; his shirt was torn from one shoulder and blackened; his eyes, bloodshot, terrible eyes glared at them both, centering on the pale, staring face of the girl. The Colt in his hand never wavered as he came through the smoke toward them.

Mamie gave a little choked cry. "Pete —why, it's Pete." Snooky's arms were still about her, but she struggled away from him, stopping as she saw that Pete was staring at the pearls in her clenched

fist, one long strand hanging down to her waist.

"You got 'em, didn't you, Mamie?"

She nodded. "Yes, I got 'em," she answered faintly. Pete looked so strange. There was a choking sensation in her throat so that she couldn't speak, couldn't run to him. Pete was looking at her face now, at the revealing, low-cut dress, the paint on her lips which was half smeared over her cheek from Snooky's kiss. "Buck?" she murmured. "Pete—you're alone?"

He didn't answer. Just as though he hadn't heard her. But at Snooky's slight movement, he snapped.

"I'm watching you both, Snooky."

"Think you're smart, don't you kid?" snarled Snooky. His voice was ugly, his hairy hands quivered with the desire to spring upon Pete, a desire held in leash by the steadiness of that hand pointing the gun toward them, the dangerous glitter in Pete's bloodshot eyes. "Think you're smart. Me an' Mamie's going to get hitched. She don't want nothing to do with a jailbird. She wants a smart guy that keeps his head above water. We're inviting yer to call on us some time, Pete."

"I'm calling now."

Pete took a few steps forward, ignoring Snooky's taunting words. The door swung crazily on its broken hinges and Pete closed it.

"You step over this way, Snooky and take a seat. There—here between me and Mamie — me an' my gal —" he laughed. A laugh mirthless and so strange that even Snooky obeyed without a word.

"You let Mamie outter this—" he snarled, but Pete turned sharply.

"Let her out? What do you suppose I broke cover fer? Not fer a rat like you, Snooky. I'd get you anyway. Mamie was me pal, me gal. I don't know but one way to settle with a dame that double-crosses her man. And I'm going ter settle with her and then—to hell with you all. I—"

The girl gave a piteous cry. For a moment the room whirled about her. Snooky, Pete's face, the picture on the wall. And then it stood still. It was as though she could see into her lover's mind, read there his poisoned suspicion, his lack of faith. Her pansy eyes, filled with wonder and sadness but not a trace of fear, stared into his face. Pete—to think like that. Pete, for whom she had endured Snooky's hated kiss, the suspense of this evening, for whom she had dragged her soul in the dust of the last six months. No, it couldn't be Pete.

She wanted to cry out—"Pete, it's not so." But her tongue was so dry, her throat contracted. She could only stand clutching the pearls in her left hand against her breast, dumb, anguished. A woman whose man had no faith. Love incarnate, bruised and torn with her lover's doubt of her.

Pete aimed the gun straight at her heart.

Suddenly she spoke—"Pete—"

In that moment she heard a click, saw him look into her face, into her eyes, his own suddenly stricken, anguished as they met the dumb, pleading look.

"Mamie—I'm mad—I—"

She smiled. A searing flame seemed to tear its way into her young breast and the smoke choked her a moment. But as she swayed a warning look flashed a message into Pete's mind. "Snooky—look—"

She saw Pete turn in time to receive Snooky's onslaught, saw the bulky form of Buck in the doorway and then darkness came, spreading like a thick, soft blanket all about her. A darkness into which she seemed to sink as though Pete's arms held her. She whispered his name as she yielded to it.

"Pete—Pete—"

Darkness and then light. She was propped against the wall, supported in Pete's arms, Buck bending over her, forcing something down her throat.

"Steady, now—" Buck was saying. "She ain't hurt much. The pearls are shot to hell, but she's all right. They was imitations but Snooky's come across

with the real ones. Had 'em planted case Mamie should guess she was bein' fooled. What on earth did you shoot her for, man? She was trapping Snooky. Trying to get him with the goods, for you Pete."

Pete groaned. Compassion swept Mamie's dazed brain as she heard him. Pete—Pete suffering because someone had lied to him. She opened her eyes. Gee, Pete didn't know. Coming in on her like that in Snooky's arms—why any man would have felt the same way.

"Pete didn't know—" her voice seemed to come from a great distance, then suddenly it was nearer, right out of her own mouth. "Gee, Buck—he didn't know. And Snooky was kissing me."

Her groping fingers found her man's hand, a worn, hardened hand, quivering now.

"Ah, kid—" she whispered.

"Mamie—" she cradled his head against her breast, her lips curving into a beautiful smile. The bullet, which had swept through the thick rope of pearls and turned aside, had grazed her flesh slightly and embedded itself in the wall beyond.

Across Pete's head, the girl's eyes met Buck's.

"Snooky?"

The detective rose to his feet, staring down at them with an almost fatherly glance.

"Got him tight." He hummed and hawed a moment. Pete did not look up and Mamie's fingers pressed into his dusty, shorn head. Buck backed to the door. "Reckon I'll see about him—" he murmured.

At the door he stopped. "Mrs. Delahanty'll be glad to get them pearls. There's a nice reward—" he began.

But Mamie and Pete were not listening.

OCTOBER BLACK MASK

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OCTOBER BLACK MASK on the newsstands SEPTEMBER 12TH

The Last Chance

By CARROLL JOHN DALY

HIDDEN HAND ADVENTURES. No. IV.

A story of Race Williams, private investigator, a man of two fists and two guns.

THE question has often arisen—how does a man feel who has just killed another man? Perhaps this is as good a time as any to wise up lads who ask such questions. I had just killed a man. And I felt the satisfaction of one who has completed a good day's work. I don't know if that's good psychology but I do know that it's a fact. Olaf Sankin and I had shot it out in the Municipal Park in West Palm Beach. Sankin had fired and missed, while—well—I've often said that I don't play with firearms.

The whole lay that I was working was as complicated in practice as it appeared simple in theory. The fireworks had started back in New York when Howard Quincy Travers walked into my office, beamed with his round benevolent face above his clerically attired body and told me what was on his chest. Simple? Sure; as I said—in theory. Old Benevolence Traver's story didn't seem to have any catches in it, as he spilled it.

He was a philanthropist, with an idea that he could eradicate crime—at least, one criminal organization and one particular leader. *The Hidden Hand* was the fancy label that this unknown criminal, who was terrorizing Florida and laying up a bankroll, bore. No honest man was sure who The Hidden Hand was. But Travers had information that four criminals, all leaders in this crime ring, knew the name of this head. And he also had a feeling that anyone of these four men, captured

and confronted with evidence of his own crimes, would divulge the name of their chief for a price. That price being—the informer's freedom. So he had hired me, at a good figure, to run down one of these four—make him a prisoner—for him, Old Benevolence, to talk to.

The pay was good, the cause commendable, and my bank account low. Just one trouble. They were bad—all four of these men. The first, Jack McCleary, had filled me full of poison gas and was on the very point of sticking a knife in my chest when I came to and drilled him clean.

Oscar Stinnes, the second lad, I had better luck with. I ran him down; made him a prisoner; turned him over to Old Benevolence Travers—and then, while I waited downstairs for him to squeal, he went and did himself in with a dose of poison.

The third lad, Olaf Sankin—known both as The Big Swede and The Slimy Swede—stepped on my pet corn, murdered an underworld moll who was about to give me information, and then made the mistake of shooting it out with me beneath the arc lights in the crowded park.

As the results showed, he was ill-advised—both ill-advised and dead. Now, where the old conscience didn't bother me for kicking off The Slimy Swede, the financial end of it did. It had not been good business. To be sure, I knocked down ten thousand dollars from Old Benevolence Travers for that bit of shooting. But, if and when I cornered one of these four men and he gave to Travers the name of the leader—The Hidden Hand—I was to receive an unlimited amount. I was to name my own figure.

At present, then, the thing looked more difficult than it did in the beginning. Four chances, and three of them were gone. Besides that, Gregory Ford—nationally known head of the detective agency which bore his name—had been hired by the State of Florida and was working for the same purpose as was I. We hit it off pretty well together, for he thought the state had hired me—secretly. But—I wanted to beat him to the pinch.

Then again, there was a girl mixed up in the thing—plopped herself right into the picture at the beginning of the case and pulled a stunt that was a brand new one on me. She saved my life! For it was she who smashed the window that gave me air when Jack McCleary, glaring through the slits in his gas mask, prepared to knife me.

Now, I don't like to appear conceited, but those who know me know that I don't make a habit of popping out of bad situations through the aid of another. I stand firmly on my own feet. But truth is truth. This girl, Tina Sears, had saved my life. And bear this in mind—she was the first and only one who could lay claim to that distinction. Therefore, I had a debt to pay to her. And what's more, I'd pay it. I'm no fool, you understand—no moving picture hero; but I owed my life to this girl and I'd risk my life to save hers if she was in danger.

Believe me, that's no idle boast. She was in danger—real danger, and no mistake. The Hidden Hand and Beekman, the last of the four subordinate leaders of this gang, held a secret of her that would mark her as a member of the gang and lay her open to a charge of murder, innocent though she was in fact.

Right smack at this moment the girl was in the hotel with me—ten minutes after the shooting of Olaf Sankin—and she was telling me that Sankin had sent for her and she must go to him, to keep her secret and protect the good name of her family—whoever they were. She'd told me, too, she first got mixed up with this crowd to help her brother, who was shot to death in my arms before I was really into the case.

That was the lay as I looked down at Tina Sears in the writing room of the hotel in West Palm Beach, Florida, and told her that Olaf Sankin was dead

and even now the whole town shrieked the news.

"Shriek"was right. They did. As I finished speaking, we both raised our hands. Crowds were running down the street in the direction of the Municipal Park—crowds who were as anxious to get there as the crowds ten minutes before were to get away. That's life! I won't try to explain it.

"He's dead—dead." Tina Sears sort of clasped her hands together in front of her. "But—he's only one—there's still that man," her voice lowered to a whisper, "The Hidden Hand—and another, who knows my secret."

"Beekman." I nodded. "He won't trouble us long. It may take time for me to hunt him down, but I'll stir him out of his hiding place—make no mistake about that. He—"

"Alexander Beekman." Her eyebrows went up slightly. "Yes, I often thought he was in it. His smiles, his smirks—his assurance, as he watches me."

"You know him then—you see him often?" My hands shot to her shoulders. "You can tell me where he is?"

"Why, that is no secret. Alexander Beekman does not hide. He has his home across the lake, in Palm Beach. Every afternoon he plays golf on the Royal Ponciana Links. He calls himself a New York jeweler, though it is an open secret that he is a pawnbroker."

"And a fence," I cut in. I knew of Beekman back in New York, and knew too, that although he was a suspected fence the police never hung anything on him.

"Maybe. But you can learn nothing from him. He is above suspicion—cruel and silent—and I believe the very right hand of this leader, the Hidden Hand. But his acquaintances, his associates, his pastimes, stamp him approved by the winter colony here. And, Mr. Williams, for your own good beware of this man. More I dare not say. His house is guarded day and night. And I know for a fact that one detective who held suspicions, but unfortunately kept those suspicions to himself, entered his house and was never seen again until his body was discovered in the inlet down by the town of Lake Worth."

"He's the lad, all right. Now, Tina, for your own best interests—come clean. I'll see you through—help you—and—"

I stopped suddenly and listened by the curtains. The voice was loud, important, and punctuated by the moving cigar I knew so well. Gregory Ford was entering the lobby of the hotel and passing close to the little curtain by the writing room door.

"Hell, Captain!" the voice boomed. "No man knows what this Williams is going to do next—but when I saw the corpse of Olaf Sankin, it was as plain to me as if he'd left his card on the stiff's chest. I—"

The loud voice rattled to silence, to boom out distant and rumbling at the hotel desk.

Tina Sears clutched me by the arm.

"It's Ford—the detective," she stammered. "Don't let him see me. Don't let him take me. Hide me away some place."

"It's got to come eventually, Tina, if you stay in this part of the country. He saw you on the boat with Jack McCleary. He suspects you. Why not tell him all that—"

"No—not now. Five minutes' start—two even—and I will be safe. He won't dare arrest me when he—" she peeped through the curtains, then crouched back. "He's coming—I—"

"The curtain—there by the window." I half pushed her toward it. The curtain wavered once, settled, and was still. I turned, to face Gregory Ford and the captain of police I had seen at the deserted house earlier in the evening.

"Gregory Ford knows everything," the detective boomed as he squinted at

me from the doorway. "Hello—" he shoved both thumbs into the armpits of his vest, "not in here, surely, to write a letter of confession—or just one of your racy memoirs after that little shooting?"

"So you know all about the shooting." I beamed across at him. I didn't like the way his eyes shot over my shoulder and anchored upon the curtain. "Did you like the killing?"

"First rate." He nodded vigorously. "If I'd been two minutes earlier I'd have heard the shot. Technically, I suppose, you'll have to be brought up and admitted to bail. If you're working for the state, you no doubt can fix that. If it's not convenient," and his cigar did a ring-around-Rosie, "I could fix it for you. Mere legal detail, you know."

"You could hardly take the credit for the shooting." I shook my head. "A score or more people looked straight into my face."

Hardly that—but we were working together last night—over on the ocean front. It might help you if—well—you were kind of acting with me tonight. Sort of couple the names, you understand. After all, Captain Rogers here understood we were together. Anyway, it might help you a bit."

How much it would help me Gregory Ford didn't realize. There was, after all, a corpse to account for. Courts are slow and the judiciary ponderous, and I had no backing which I could reveal except my own two guns and the will to use them.

"We'll call it a duet then." I took the extended, pudgy hand. "Sort of acting for you, eh? But independent in the future."

"Exactly. Alone here?"

I turned, too, and looked at the curtain. It was waving slightly. Gregory Ford winked at me and crossed the room. I followed—then stopped. The captain of the police leaned against the wall, his right hand half beneath his coat. He had been warned then. Gregory Ford had not forgotten his last attempt to arrest the girl, and my interference. So I shrugged my shoulders and stood my ground. I'd have to talk him into letting her go.

"No need to feel alarmed, Race." Gregory stood with his hand on the curtain. "The clerk told me of the female who was waiting here for you. She evidently has given you some good advice—and you've acted upon it. You can't fool Gregory Ford." He suddenly jerked back the curtain.

The space behind it was empty. The girl had gone. A long French window swayed slightly in the sudden draft.

II

GREGORY FORD'S unlighted cigar pounded gainst his upper lip. Leaning forward he peered cautiously out the window. My grin met his when he turned, but his grin won. Gregory Ford was not a half bad detective. My smile faded as his grew.

"A young lady of parts, Race. Decidedly a young lady whose acquaintance would be worth cultivating." And then snapping the words, "well—she's been followed, and if I'm not mistaken here's Fletcher with a bit of information."

Detective Fletcher, the white of a new bandage showing beneath his gray fedora hat, appeared in the doorway. He eyed me, slightly belligerent, slightly shamefaced—but the blow he had received on the head earlier in the evening had not been such a bad one.

"Speak up!" Gregory Ford ordered. "Mr. Williams and I have come to an understanding. It's about the party that just left by the writing room window?"

"Yes, it is." Fletcher cleared his throat. "We weren't exactly expecting a woman—but Gearson and Brown followed her. She walked toward Clamatis street and the park. We didn't know if you wanted a pinch."

"You couldn't." Gregory nodded. "For I don't know myself." He eyed me shrewdly. "But we'll be walking toward

the park. They won't lose her now?"

"No chance." Fletcher smiled. "She saw me, I think, but not them. They slipped into the crowd that are flocking down Narcissus street, toward the park."

"The park?" Gregory Ford rubbed his chin. "And you, Race—it's an old belief that the criminal is drawn back to the scene of his crime."

"Right." And arm in arm Gregory Ford and I left the hotel.

I didn't fully understand Gregory Ford then. When he blustered and bellowed and puffed, he was as easy to read as an open book. But it wasn't like him to be cagey and evasive. I had a feeling that he knew more than he let out, and that inside of him he was enjoying a certain superiority over me.

"How come you had the window watched—what made you suspect that the girl would be here?"

"This time, Race," he pinched my arm, "the heart ruled the head. My good fortune in having a couple of men outside that window was due entirely to big heartedness. Olaf Sankin was dead. You had killed him. The law of vengeance is the law of the criminal. I won't say I expected you to be shot dead in the hotel tonight, for I know very well that you can play at that game as well as another. When I entered the hotel I had it watched. That the girl fell into the bag was purely accidental—one of the lucky breaks in the game, of which you have had so many and I so few."

"But the girl, Gregory. She did me a service—a great service. Can't you let her go? The help she gives me will reflect back to you."

"Maybe yes—maybe no. One girl, Rosie Sorellie, would have talked—and died. Why not this one? Then again—what she has confided to you, I do not know. And damn it all, Race, you can't go on forever. Let us say that it is even money you'll live through the thing—ten to one the girl won't. It's impossible to think that this gang don't know of her meetings with you. No—I can't chance it. She'll talk to me or I'll drag her in."

"And the charge?" I wanted to learn if Gregory Ford, too, knew her secret—the secret that this criminal and his leader held over her head.

"Well—" again the hand caressed his chin, "that depends on who she is and if she has a record. I don't doubt that half a dozen things will pop up after we get her in the line-up. It they don't—there's her presence with McCleary, on the boat."

"She might have just met him on the boat. A passing acquaintance that—"

"Good God!" Gregory Ford stopped dead in the middle of the sidewalk, "you'll be advancing the theory in a minute that she heard of McCleary's past and was trying to reform him. If she's such a sweet, innocent bit of goods, why fear her arrest? She'll undoubtedly put us all to shame and leave the police station with our humble apologies."

No—decidedly, I didn't like Gregory Ford's humor this night.

"Just what are your suspicions?" I asked Gregory as we reached the cross street that led to the park, and waited for the mass of cars to pass.

"Well—there's several. The least of which is not the idea that she gay-cats for this gang; sort of works around in the big houses—spots the lay and maps it for the boys."

"Gregory," I told him, "before this thing's over you'll need me. I'm going to get this Hidden Hand. The girl's done a lot for me—let her go. I'll be responsible for her, and when the showdown comes with the Hidden Hand I'll deal you in."

"Just what has she done for you?" His eyes were narrow as he watched me now.

"She saved my life," I said simply. "I'd do a lot for that girl. You're playing a dangerous game."

The cigar did tricks across his face.

"You went in for a killing this night," he said. "I could curtail your activities for some time. And I'm not fool enough

to laugh at your bluff. If you tell me that in crossing you I'm playing a dangerous game, I believe it. And I'm willing to believe it. Now—in plain words—is your threat one of indifference to future trouble I may get into, or is your threat one of personal violence?"

We stood on the curb by the thickly packed cars before The Kettler Theatre—shoulder to shoulder, face to face, eye to eye. There was no doubt that Gregory Ford was a fearless man.

"There's my position with the state." I played up to his belief that I had been hired by the State of Florida.

"Hell! Forget that. I saw the attorney general in Miami last night, and the State of Florida has nothing whatever to do with your activities. You see, they think you're working for me."

I guess I smiled rather sheepishly. So Gregory Ford had been carrying me along lately, when I thought that I was carrying him. The line of cars began to move slowly. A big sedan pulled closer to the curb, the door opened and a man leaned out.

"Mr. Ford," he called. "She's in the curtained taxi two cars ahead. Will you or—"

But Gregory Ford was already climbing into the sedan. He paused on the step when I would have followed him.

"For a price." He let the captain of police and Fletcher squeeze by him and enter the car. "The name of the party who hired you, Race. Come—" as the line moved, "the name of your client, for the girl's liberty."

And I—I just stood and looked at him as the door of the sedan closed.

If he had only waited—only given me a chance to get in touch with Old Benevolence Travers. Benevolence, under the circumstances, might allow me to give his name to Gregory Ford.

Of course I owed something to the girl, but that was personal. My ethics have been shot to pieces many times. But under no circumstances could I betray the confidence of my client.

The sedan pulled away, the cars moved more quickly. And I acted. I just hopped aboard a hunk of tin that was three cars behind the police machine. A young lad about nineteen was driving it.

I explained my presence simply enough.

"Detective, Buddy. Follow that sedan. The black one, with the cracked window in the rear."

"Yeh—" the boy's eyes brightened. "About this—this shooting in the park. I wanted to see—"

"Not a word!" I shushed him with a look that Gregory Ford might have envied. "Let me see if you've got the makings of a real flatty in you."

And the boy did. We turned along the lake, on to the road which led to the bridge and Palm Beach—the same bridge that I crossed but a few hours before. A clock somewhere knocked off the half hour.

I had to call down the speed of the flivver when we reached the bridge, for we were close to the police car, with only one car between us.

"Just hold your distance, son," I told the boy. "I don't want little Mary in the car ahead to suspect she's got a lamb. And never mind asking questions about the shooting in the park," I killed that talk, "keep your mind on the black boat ahead."

Our speed increased as we reached Royal Palm Way, but not to any great extent. Where the black sedan could make monkeys of us, the taxi the girl had probably couldn't. But Gregory Ford was not anxious to overtake the girl yet. He wanted to find out where she was going.

A block from the ocean the car between us went straight on but the police car turned right. Now we were right behind the black sedan. But the speed was not great enough to make Gregory Ford think we followed him.

Faintly I saw the taxi shoot left on a narrow road. Then the rear light on the police car went out—just a black

shadow as it, too, made the curve. I leaned forward and switched out the flivver's lights.

"We're playing the game in the dark, too," I told the youth.

"Gee!" and "Gee!" again, was the best he could get out. But there was nothing of fear in his voice—just enthusiasm. That's youth.

III

DIMLY, ahead, I made out the taillight of Tina Sear's taxi as it pulled up to the curb by a small house on the left of the road. Directly across the street was the wall of a big estate that seemed to stretch far down to the ocean road. Far back were the lights of a great house—the house itself plainly visible, stretching its Spanish architecture over a considerable bit of ground. But it was the small house before which Tina Sears stopped.

The girl evidently didn't see the shadows of the five men who climbed from the black sedan perhaps a hundred and fifty feet behind her. Dimly, shadowy, she stood by the side of the taxi, paying off the driver. But if she didn't notice the occupants of the sedan, the occupants of the sedan noticed her.

As two of the men started toward the girl, three others hesitated on the sidewalk in the shadows of a tall palm. Would they give their attention to the girl or to the flivver in which I had followed them?

Well—I'd give them a surprise and give the girl a chance. I leaned forward and switched on the headlights. The semi-darkness of the street blazed into light; a circle of brilliant yellow that lit full upon the five men and reflected clearly the brass buttons of a policeman's uniform.

Just for a split second the moving picture ahead became a still. The girl stood beside the taxi—the four detectives and the one harness bull stopped dead, facing the light. I hung half on the step of the flivver. There we posed for the fraction of a second, just like a three sheet poster advertising a mystery movie. And the show was on.

Two men moved toward me—three toward the girl. Another, whom I thought the captain of police, looked out from the sedan. Silent, motionless and uncertain, the girl stood beside the taxi. Then she walked toward the little house, reached the gate before the entrance, and turning suddenly ran frantically back across the sidewalk and out on the road, full into the glare of the headlights. There was no doubt that she understood the situation now. And there was no doubt of her intention. Diplomacy, bluff, or her own assurance that they could not harm her was at an end. Whether it was panic, fear, or the certainty of disaster if she were caught, didn't matter. She was fleeing for her freedom; running like a common thief from the law.

The girl had hardly reached the center of the road before Gregory Ford's voice called its warning—its order for her to halt. She heard it of course, but only ran the faster. Then the police broke into life. Gregory's orders were short and effective. There was nothing panicky about him. He was in no way excited that events had taken such an abrupt turn. The girl had declared herself afraid of the law. She'd have hard work explaining that later.

Gregory Ford and another went directly after Tina Sears. Two others covered the opposite side of the street where the girl might have sought seclusion, at least temporarily, in the thick jungle growth. Now that retreat was cut off to her.

To her right was the high wall of the big estate; directly ahead, the Ocean Boulevard road and the beach; to her left the jungle growth—but the two officers had made escape that way impossible. The girl was caught. There didn't seem a chance for her. But I joined the chase, making directly after the girl.

"It's all right." I recognized the detective who waited, and watched me. "Race Williams, you know—in on the show of course." There was a ring of confidence in my voice—surely Gregory Ford hadn't discussed my friendship for the girl with this lad.

And Gregory hadn't. The first words of the detective convinced me of that. His name was Brown—a middle aged, rotund, garden-growing detective of fiction. It was all too much for him. He ran by my side for a moment, grumbling.

"You, eh, Williams? And messed things again with that light."

With relief I saw him pocket his gun. Then, as I gained on him, he gasped, "Who's this dame anyway—and what's she been doing? I wouldn't recognize her if I saw her—just spotted her little figure hurrying down the street and slipping into a taxi."

And that was all from him. He had bad dogs as well as being overweight.

And now the boy driver of the hunk of tin was showing his stuff. I cursed him silently. The flivver had come to life and was shooting down the road. It wasn't that which bothered me. But the headlights. He just moved fast enough to flash the picture of the running girl before the officers.

Tina Sears was making time—useless time. The detective and the harness bull across the street were almost abreast of her. Having prevented her chance of crossing into the heavy growth, they cut out into the street, in a fair way to head her off before she reached the Ocean Boulevard road or the beach—though that would do her precious little good.

Gregory Ford called once or twice and even threatened to fire, I think. But the dick with him was an athletic fellow; didn't waste his breath, and was eating up the distance between himself and the girl—making feet out of yards, and then inches out of feet.

Tina Sears lost her head completely. At least she seemed to, for she ducked suddenly and dashed madly toward the stone wall. Even if she could have jumped up, grasped the top and swung over, the opportunity was lost. The man was right on top of her.

I saw her reach the wall, turn suddenly in the brilliancy of the headlights, and face her pursuer. Gregory Ford shouted something; the two men crossing the street called out hoarsely; the young fellow driving the flivver shouted, too, and swerved the car as, for the first time in the excitement of the pursuit, he saw the two officers directly in his path.

I guess they had a close call but I couldn't be sure. The swerving of the car blotted out the picture of the detective in the very act of pouncing upon the girl. The shadow of the wall, a Banyan tree that hung over it from inside the grounds, and the sudden disappearance of the headlights all helped make the semi-darkness of the Southern night seemingly black.

There was a stab of yellow, the roar of a gun—and silence. Then a curse from Gregory Ford, the answering shout of men, and a voice above the others.

"It's Gearson—and the dame has killed him."

Then came the voice of Gregory Ford, in breathless, hoarse jerks.

"But the girl—where is she, you fool. I—damn it, man, she's gone."

The next instant I was on the scene. Flashlights were out. Detective Gearson lay upon the coarse grass close to the wall, a huddled silent mass.

Shocked? Yes, I was considerably shocked. I knew that the girl carried a gun. I knew, too, that in that last few seconds she had a chance to use it. I knew, too, that she feared capture. But —well—a shot in the arm, the leg, or even the shoulder would have served her purpose to escape. And Detective Gearson had been shot through the neck. But he wasn't dead. The tiny trickle of blood told me that the bullet must have missed his jugular vein.

Gregory Ford took one look at the inert body, rolled Gearson over on his

back, cursed out the taxi driver and the lad who had driven the flivver, and was a man of action again.

"There—" he thrust out a pudgy finger. "A gate—come on. We'll get this she-devil. Hatton," he turned to the harness bull, "stay by Gearson until Captain Rogers comes up. Chase that taxi for an ambulance, and the other bloat that drove Williams, for the nearest doctor. As for you—" he turned to me, "come along, if you want to be in at the end of it. I've got a charge now—and it's *murder.*"

"But—Gearson may pull—"

"Not him." Gregory Ford nodded vigorously, and I saw the gun he held in his hand.

Gregory, the two detectives, and myself passed through the little gate and found ourselves in spacious, well kept grounds. Distantly, the lights in the house stood out. A fountain; great clusters of unfamiliar bush; an occasional giant palm; and just behind us the great Banyan tree which overhung the wall.

But across that vast stretch of open, well kept lawn no figure ran. No windows were open at the big house, no heads peered out. Not odd that, for it was hardly possible that the shot had been heard, or if it had at that distance it might easily be taken for the back-fire of a car, a blowout, or just the roar of the ocean as it pounded on the beach.

I think that I saw the girl first; her lithe figure dashed suddenly from behind a marble fountain and sped straight across the open, toward the house. That she saw us was certain, but again just one thing was in her mind. Speed! What she hoped to accomplish by speed now, I don't know. Certainly there was no place to hide close to the house. Certainly she was clearly outlined in the moonlight. Certainly she couldn't hope to get around the house.

And certainly she didn't intend to try to get around it. The house was broad; she ran straight toward the side of it; straight toward a little side porch before two lighted windows.

"Don't be a fool, Gregory," I called hoarsely as I knocked up his gun hand. "My God! you wouldn't shoot down a woman like that. Not give her a chance."

"A chance!" And the words that followed sort of stuck in his throat as he ran. "What chance did she give Gearson? There'll be a wife and two kiddies there." And when I ran ahead and got between him and the girl, he said, "You're right, Race. She can't escape me now. I'll sweat her for this night's work—by God, fry her, too, if Gearson dies."

I left Gregory Ford far behind in my dash toward the house. He didn't order me to stop. There was nothing I could do now to help the girl, and I knew it. My speed was accentuated by the speed of one of the other detectives, and I saw, too, that in his hand there flashed the silver of metal. It was Fletcher.

What would the girl do? She was almost slap up against the big house. She couldn't hope to avoid her pursuers even if she did have access to the house—some millionaire's, or perhaps bootlegger's, estate. Certainly she wouldn't turn and try to shoot it out with all of us. And—I couldn't picture the girl in the roll of a killer—a common, ordinary moll of the underworld. Yet—what was I to believe? I knew that she had a gun—and there was Gearson, a living—or perhaps now, a dead example for her will to use it.

She reached the porch, dashed up it, struggled a moment before the door—and was gone. Disappeared within the house. Fletcher and I stood silently waiting for Gregory Ford and the rotund Brown to come up. The door was now locked from the inside.

"Cover the grounds," Gregory told Fletcher and Brown. "I'm going in. Now—who belongs to this palace?"

"Andrew Gordon King." And there was awe in Brown's voice.

"Not—not the New York banker!" And Gregory's voice showed that he,

too, had proper respect for great wealth.

"Exactly." Brown nodded. "He's in Palm Beach now, too—and from the lights, I'd say he was at home. He's got a bad temper."

"What do I care for his temper?" Gregory swaggered slightly.

"Well—you better had, if you don't want your activities in Florida stamped on." Captain Rogers came suddenly upon the scene. "If he's made men, he's broke men, too. I—"

"You don't need to come in. This dame killed a man and I—"

"Gearson ain't so bad," Captain Rogers went on. "I had a look at him before I followed. This girl may work here as a blind—may even be gay-catting for the Hidden Hand. But handle Mr. King with kid gloves, and I wouldn't mention any shooting on his lawn. He don't favor notoriety."

"Yeh—" Gregory Ford went to stroking his chin. He wasn't so cocksure of himself. And he was right. Great wealth must be respected, and the name of Andrew Gordon King was mentioned with the names of the mighty.

Captain Rogers went on.

"We'll watch the grounds. Perhaps she'll try an out on the other side. I don't know what she looks like, but we'll arrest any dame who looks suspicious. We'll all be needed out here."

"Right. I've handled bigger things than this." Gregory Ford puffed a little. "My name will mean something even to Andrew Gordon King." Then to me, "You better come along with me. I want to keep an eye on you."

IV

I LAUGHED a bit, I guess, as I followed Gregory Ford to the front door. I was glad Gearson wasn't so badly hurt, and I noticed, too, how quickly the police left the little porch and scattered over the grounds. It may have been Southern efficiency—and again, it may have been a desire to steer clear of the millionaire. As for me, I shrugged my shoulders. I had no political job to lose.

Gregory Ford was a good diplomat. Andrew Gordon King proved affable enough, if a little impatient. It appeared he was ready to go to some social affair or benefit, at the Beach Club.

He spoke with quiet dignity.

"Of course I shall not leave the house until you have convinced yourself that all my servants are honest and respectable. There may be one or two new ones, whom my butler will point out. You say the woman actually ran in the side door. Gracious me—she may be hiding in the house now, though that seems impossible."

"No one has come in or gone out." The butler was quite emphatic. "The side door is always locked. A common thief, sir? Surely, not a desperate character?"

"No cause for alarm," Gregory Ford assured the old retainer. Not to ease his fears personally, but because he thought that the butler would be more willing to point out places where one might hide—if that one was harmless.

Then more delay. The lady of the house pounded down the great stairway and wanted to know what was what. We had to go through the thing again, while Mrs. King pulled "oh" and "ah" and "impossible" and her husband assured her that "these men are but doing their duty to the city and the state—and are no doubt mistaken."

I'll give Gregory Ford credit for sticking doggedly to it. He didn't tell Mr. King outright that he thought the girl was part of the household. But strange crooks don't wander into a house like that and conceal themselves; especially after being driven out to that house and having made a bee-line for it. Gregory believed, and so did I, that this girl would turn out to be a maid, a secretary or a domestic of some sort. The butler left us, to line up the servants.

"All—mind you," Gregory said se-

verely. "If there's a suddenly sick one, we'll visit the room."

Gregory paced nervously about. Mrs. King toyed with a tiny statue upon the mantel, and Mr. King spent his time between watching that I didn't lift any of the knickknacks and pretending to peruse a book of poems. As for me—I hung out against the mantel, in the most approved detective style and wondered what the ponderous, dignified banker would actually think if he knew the type of young lady who was somewhere within his house.

Damn it, I hadn't more than seen the legs on the stairs when Gregory Ford smothered a curse and reached for his gun. Not only reached for it, but actually jerked it into his hand. Yep, it got a rise out of me, too. I jumped erect—arm off the mantel.

Beautiful? Sure. Low-cut gown, delicate neck, flesh-colored stockings and silver slippers. Little jewelry—nothing, in fact, but a single string of beads. I'm not going to hide the truth. I was stumped. For the girl who stood silently now on the last step was Tina Sears, who less than fifteen minutes before had shot down a policeman at the little gate.

Gregory stepped forward with the gun still in his hand. His eyes bulged and his mouth hung open. He bent a bit and peered at her as if he were looking through a telescope. Then he gulped, tried to speak—swallowed a couple of times and looked at me.

And the girl spoke.

"I couldn't help but hear." There was just the faintest tremor in her voice, that neither the banker nor his wife seemed to catch. "Someone in the house—and wanted by the law. How thrilling! And these gentlemen are detectives?"

She came down the last step and, with an easy, graceful, and perhaps somewhat defiant swing of her body, crossed directly to Gregory Ford.

"How thrilling." And she beamed on Ford as she held out a little white hand—a hand that should have been stained with blood. "A real detective—" she turned to Mr. King. "You must present me—really."

"Mr. Ford, my dear." And the "dear" held a note of protest. "This, Mr. Ford, is my daughter, Miss Tina King."

His daughter—the daughter of Andrew Gordon King!

Ford stared at the girl. I don't know what was in his mind. I guess it was a certain gladness that Gearson hadn't been killed—not gladness for Gearson, nor his wife and children—but a gladness for Gregory Ford himself. No one would envy him the job of laying his hand on the shoulder of Andrew Gordon King's daughter and saying, "I want you for murder."

And what's more, Gregory didn't. He let her take his hand and let her put it back at his side again, and then with a stern look he pocketed his gun. He knew her and knew that he knew her, and yet he was telling himself that he never saw her before in his life.

"And this gentleman?" The girl turned to me. "He, too, is—"

And I stopped her. She wouldn't make any monkey out of me—millionaire or no millionaire. She could high-hat and pound down Gregory Ford with the weight of gold, but not Race Williams.

"No need of an introduction to me, Miss King, surely." My words wiped the smile off her face like you'd rubbed a mop across it. "Surely you remember me—on the boat, coming down from New York. I shall never forget how pleasant you made my trip, nor how you gave me air when I was—" and I hung over the word until she went white and wobbled on her feet—"was seasick," I finished.

Her smile now was a sickly one. She turned her back and walked to the window. It was then that the butler came in with the information that the servants were all gathered in the servants' hall.

Gregory Ford looked over the servants like a man in a dream. They all looked thick enough to be honest.

What Gregory told Andrew Gordon King I don't know—nor do I think that Gregory himself knew.

Andrew Gordon King saw us to the door and watched the butler lock it behind us before he went down the steps to the big Rolls-Royce that waited for him. I managed to get a word in with Mrs. King.

"You have a son, Mrs. King?" And I watched her face. Tina had said that the boy who was killed was her brother. There had been nothing like that in the papers. I wondered if Mrs. King knew of his death—or his activities before his death—or if as far as the family was concerned he had been dead for years.

"Son!" She looked straight into my face without emotion. "I have no son."

"He—died then." There was just the right touch of sympathetic apology in my voice.

"Died?" And the woman was certainly hiding nothing. She had one of these Western faces—the great wide open spaces. "I never had a son."

There was no secret, no worry, no lines of sorrow in Mrs. King's face. She had not lied to me. If Mrs. King had no son, her daughter had no brother. Tina, then, had lied to me.

V

ANDREW GORDON KING and his wife drove away. The watchers joined us as we reached the gate. Gregory Ford was strangely silent after he ordered the men to get the car. But he stayed by the gate with me. Finally he produced half of an unlighted cigar from a vest pocket and spoke.

"What do you make of that—and what the devil are you laughing at? What's funny in seeing a man shot down and then—"

"Why not make the pinch? This bowing to wealth doesn't fit you, Gregory."

"It's not that." He shot his jaw out at me. "That's a damn lie, and you know it. I played safe. I had to. Suppose I took her in. Who's to believe my story? My men only know that they followed a girl. If I get a judge to hold her, how will I get a jury to convict her? If she were poor or unknown, or even a crook—but the daughter of Andrew Gordon King; a leader of the younger set—I can't get a motive. I'd be laughed at—or driven out of the court by money."

He paused a minute, then jabbed me in the chest. "She's a cool one and no mistake. It can't be money she wants; it can't be— By God! It's blackmail and fear. See the girl, Race—tell her I'll give her twenty-four hours to come clean with me. Then—I'll either ride with her, or I'll wind the web so tightly about her that all her father's millions won't pull her through the mesh. But to shoot a man—" Again his hand went to his chin, but he didn't finish the last sentence.

"You've got to be with Gregory Ford or against him." He turned to me before he climbed into the sedan that drew up. "Tell her that. And think it over yourself. You've both got to come clean with me. I want to know who she fears—and I want to know who hires you; and both your ropes will be considerably shortened if you don't come clean."

I turned back to the house as Gregory Ford drove away. He wasn't such a dumb-bell after all. It was better to play with wealth than against it. The State of Florida couldn't pay the half of what Andrew Gordon King could pay. And I wanted to talk to the girl myself.

The butler threw his eyes up near his forehead when he saw me, but I pushed right by him and swung toward the room to the right, across from the living room. I had seen those curtains moving when I started back toward the

house. I wanted to surprise the girl. Was she telephoning someone? Was she laughing at the way she had put it over, or—and I stopped dead in that room. The girl was sitting by the window, and, though her eyes were dry, there was agony written plainly on that fine young face.

"All right," I told Butts, when he followed me in. The girl nodded and finally found words to dismiss him. He didn't like it—but she sniffed and left.

"What do you want?" The girl I knew as Tina Sears turned and faced me, one hand gripping the arm of the couch.

She didn't know what was in my mind until too late. For I stepped across the room, flung back a pillow and picked up the revolver I had seen her slip there when she heard my feet.

"I want this." I smelt it—broke it open and snapped it closed again. It was fully loaded—and had not lately been discharged. Then I looked at her face again and threw my bomb.

"The detective won't live," I lied. "How does it feel to add murder to the list?"

"Murder! Detective!" If it was acting, it was great stuff and no mistake.

"Come, Tina." I shook her by the shoulder.

She stopped me—made me tell her what I meant by "murder," and was so insistent that I finally went through with the thing—just as if she didn't know all about it.

"So that was the shot I heard." She nodded. "I thought they were shooting—to frighten me."

"You're not going to tell me you didn't—!"

Again she stopped me. Great brown, frightened eyes looked into mine—a white face was close—perfect lips trembled—but her voice, though low, never broke.

"You don't believe I fired that shot?" And when I would have laid the whole thing before her again she cut me short. "You don't believe I fired that shot? Yes or no."

And, damn it all, I answered "No." What's more, it was the truth—not thought of before that moment. I was a fool maybe. But it wasn't the eyes; the soft, beautiful face; the delicate lips. It was something deeper than that—something that came from inside me, not the girl. There was no reasoning to it—just instinct. I didn't believe she fired that shot.

I didn't go into the thing with her then. I took advantage of her mood; her fear and agony; the reaction of her desperate acting a few minutes before. I even forgot the lie about her brother. I just gave her Gregory Ford's message and followed it up with one of my own. Somehow I felt that I knew why the gun was beneath the pillow, and what she contemplated doing with it. And I kept it.

"Come clean, Tina. Trust me." I gripped her arms and pulled her to her feet. "You saved my life on the boat—again in Miami. You can't carry your burden alone. I'll see you through. Why did you save my life, if—"

"I don't know. I don't know. Something snapped within me. It wasn't reason; it wasn't the will to do good. I deserve no credit for it." And then suddenly putting both hands on my shoulders, "Don't ever trust me, Race Williams—don't ever believe me. I'm weak and bad—that time on the boat probably some inherited good swayed me against my will. I don't want to be bad; I don't want to die. But I don't want others to know my sorrow—my shame. I saved you then, yes—and I may pay for it—may even die for it—may face disgrace for it. There're suspicion and doubt and uncertainty amidst these vile criminals—even up to the power himself—this Hidden Hand."

"When crooks fall out, honest men get—" I started.

"Honest men, yes—but not I—not I. I saved you once; perhaps twice. I might betray you tomorrow. Maybe—"

And suddenly her arms went around my neck. She was clinging to me, crying softly, and talking as she pulled my head down close to hers. "I didn't know then. I don't know now. But you're brave and strong, and I thought that you could— For they fear you as well as hate you. It's not the law, or the electric chair, or the mass meetings in the parks and the rumbling threats of the outraged citizens who demand that this Hidden Hand be dragged from his hiding—it's you they fear. And—oh, Race—that time when I stepped before you and was shot in Miami, I'd have gladly died then that you—you—"

And I didn't push her away. I could see her eyes swim, and knew the truth. She wasn't acting now.

"Listen, Tina." I held her by the shoulders and straightened her up. "I'm in the game and I'm going to run down the leader. And get this: You saved my life. You're the only one to lay claim to that distinction. Somehow, when the show-down comes, I'll see you through. If you ever need me, I'll come to you—or for you."

"No—no," she cried over and over. "Never trust me—never. I'd sacrifice my life that my mother shall never know—but don't ever trust me. If I send for you, ask for your help—don't come to me, not even if they kill me. For I'd trap you as I did before, in Miami. And the next time—but don't come—never come." And her head went down again on my chest.

I used my hand to push her chin up this time. I looked straight into her eyes and I took my time before I said my say. "Tina," I told her slowly—making every word count, "I've always paid my debts. There's no one can say Race Williams ever laid down on a friend. You saved my life. If you ever need me or if you ever want me, I'll come to you—trap or no trap." I stopped her when she would have started in again. "It's no use. I'll pay my debt—whether it's the good or bad in you that calls, when you send for me."

Melodramatic? Maybe. Stage heroics? Perhaps. Just plain dumbness or cheap conceit? More than likely. I shan't make excuses. I hadn't fallen for a slender bit of dress goods. But one thing was certain. I meant exactly what I said. If Beekman or this Hidden Hand himself, or any other member of the gang hoped to trap me through the girl—why—they'd better be ready for the fireworks. For I'd come—walk right into the trap with my eyes open—my guns, too, as far as that was concerned.

There was the whir of a motor, the thud of a closing door, footsteps on the porch, and the ring of a bell far back in the house.

"This way—" the girl led me to a window. "It's father—forgotten something—he always leaves his notes behind when he's to speak. I'm—I'm not just fitted to explain your presence away now."

I left her, spotted the car before the house, hopped the wall and sought the ocean road. I reached Gus' Baths before I found a taxi and was driven back to my hotel in West Palm Beach.

VI

I WASN'T getting any credit yet for that bit of shooting in the park. The story was out that it was police business. There was a letter in my box. Not a word or a line from Old Benevolence Travers—just a check for ten thousand iron men. Well—he couldn't have said more if he wrote volumes. Somehow, then, he knew that I pulled off that little bit of gunplay. Why not? He didn't need three guesses.

But I knew his hotel and where he'd be, and I knew, too, that my job was to get hold of Beekman. That shouldn't be very hard, if he wasn't in hiding. Just to get him alone, where we wouldn't be disturbed—and Travers could lay the evidence he had against Beekman before

him and offer him his liberty for a squeal on the Hidden Hand.

And this time I didn't intend Beekman to turn out a corpse. It was my last chance. From the way I understood it, there wasn't another living soul who knew who the Hidden Hand was. No, sir—Beekman must be delivered up to Travers in a glass case. Well—there wasn't any special hurry. It was possible that Beekman had not heard of Olaf Sankin's death—it might be to my advantage to wait until the morning papers were out. Maybe it would strike some fear into Beekman. Besides, I had twenty-four hours anyway before Gregory Ford would take a crack at the girl or myself. It wasn't much after eleven when I hit my room, slipped off my things and lazied off in the chair to smoke—not to think. Just smoke.

I was just about ready to turn in, when the phone rang.

"That'll be Old Benevolence Travers," I thought. And it wasn't. There was nothing disguised about the voice over the wire; no attempt at being dramatic. Just like an ordinary business call.

"Mr. Alexander Beekman—wishing to speak to Race Williams. Ah—I expected I'd find you in."

"Right!" I said, trying to make my voice as indifferent as his, and going flat on it, I guess.

"You rather ran out on me tonight." He laughed musically. "Just got a glimpse of you as you jumped the wall over at Andrew Gordon King's place. You gay young Lothario—but I'm not married myself and certainly Miss Tina King—or Tina Sears—is a most charming girl. Especially appealing—lady in distress, and that sort of thing."

"Yes," was the best I could get off. I was talking to a high-class lad this time—and I knew it.

"I was talking to Miss King just a moment ago and I was pleased to know that you were interested in me. May we have a talk at some place I suggest?"

"I would prefer to suggest the place myself." I gave him the answer he might have expected.

"I know. I know." I could hear him chuckle. "But I have with me now a mutual friend. A lady you made a promise to—a rather reckless promise, I gather. I think the young lady would appreciate it if you came to see me—at the place I suggest. I am almost sure, too, that it would be for the best interest of her peace of mind. But—I am positive, Mr. Williams, that it would be best for her physical well-being."

"If the young lady is there," I tried to keep my voice calm, "I might speak to her." And when he hesitated, "I would like simply to assure myself of her presence there with you."

"Very well." There was a moment's silence—then the shrill voice of a girl—the girl, Tina.

"Don't come, Race—don't come. They—he—" A muffled scream, distant like—and the voice of Beekman again.

"Women are so temperamental," he said, without emotion. "But it is enough, Mr. Williams, to let you know that she is here with me. She has very obligingly told me some interesting facts. She wouldn't at first, of course—but under persuasion—I have most persuasive ways—she spoke of falling glass and much-needed air to a friend. You understand—your presence, then, against the girl's—freedom." And in that final word lay the whole story—the whole threat.

"Let me assure you that nothing will happen to you. I—"

But I cut in on him.

"I'll come," I said. "Give me the place and the time."

"The place and the time." I heard his chuckle grate along the wire. "You see, I'm careless in business matters. I don't really know the place yet—but the time; say, now—tonight. A friend will call for you with a car. You will listen to his suggestions—understand that they are imperative and follow them to the letter. I won't threaten you, Mr. Wil-

liams—and not being a doctor, perhaps I shouldn't speak with too much knowledge. But I'd say that the little lady's life is in danger—a stimulant such as your presence might—indeed, would—But there—she's young and strong, also rather a dainty bit of beauty, and—"

A dull click—and silence. I sat there, the receiver in my hand. I didn't have a bit of doubt that Beekman would torture information from the girl. I didn't have a bit of doubt that he would kill her. And I didn't have a bit of doubt that he was planning to lead me to my death. But I was going. I'd keep my promise to the girl. And she was plucky, at that. No matter what they had done to her—no matter how they had threatened her, she told me not to come. She knew then—knew they planned to kill me, and her, too. Yet, with the opportunity I had given her, she might have saved herself much pain by calling me herself and trapping me some place. I clenched my hands at my sides. I'd come for her all right—I'd come.

And I wouldn't come as Beekman expected me to come. I'd come in a way that would surprise him. Oh, if I had to—and thought the girl would go free—but time was passing. Beekman's "friend" would call. I took to cleaning my guns—with special attention to my tiny twenty-five calibre automatic. Then I dressed again.

I took several clippings from my wallet and went carefully over them. They were well done—about half a dozen of them—looked exactly as if they'd been cut carelessly from the New York newspapers. I placed them on the little desk, just under the telephone. The one on top began pleasantly enough:

NOTORIOUS DETECTIVE SUSPECTED OF BEING UNKNOWN TORTURER

Criminal Dies in Hospital after Hours of Indescribable Agony.

There was more, of course—well written, by a lad with a morbid imagination and a gift of expression. They were good stuff, with a ring of truth in the writing. It even got me mad just to read them over. Now, for the first time in my career, I intended to make use of them. Would the man who was sent for me come alone? Much depended on that. As I placed the phone down on the clippings, it rang. It was the desk clerk. I had a visitor.

I knew him, too. It was the ugly, lead-pipe face that had been shoved against the window outside Stinnes' office in Miami. He was nervous and ill at ease. It may have been the new blue suit, the stiff collar, and the straw hat that was on his head as if nailed there. Surely, he'd have looked better in a sweater and cap and dirty trousers. He was a tough-looking baby; a lad they wouldn't miss if I knocked him over. At that, I liked him. He was just the type I needed to complete the plan I'd made.

"No tricks, Bozo." He closed the door and started wandering about the room—searching the closet, looking under the bed, and sticking his big head into the bathroom.

"I know ya and know ya record. I ain't aimin' to cross guns with ya. I'm here to search ya an' take ya with me."

"I'm to go without guns, then—that's it?"

"That's it—right enough."

"And if I won't go, which of course I won't—what then?"

"There's the woman." He twisted his lips. "She'll be a pretty mess if you ain't there in about a hour. But—"

The phone rang.

"That'll be Beekman." He jerked a dirty thumb toward the telephone instrument. "Lis'en ta him. The party's yours an' his."

"On time?" Beekman's voice came to me as I lifted the receiver. "My man is there? Good—now, we'll have no firearms—nice peaceful affair. I'll call back in ten minutes—my man can

tell me then if you're agreeable to come, and— But listen."

Shrill, piercing—a scream of agony came over the phone. And then a voice —her voice—Tina Sears'.

"No more! No more! I can tell you no more. I—" And then, louder —and shrill with horror and perhaps pain, "Don't come, Race—don't come— to your—"

We banged down the receivers together, I guess. The flat-faced man was looking at me—sneering at me—grinning evilly.

"That'll be my job if you don't come, and I get—"

"I'll come. A drink first—in the bathroom—sit there."

With an unsteady hand I lifted the phone so that the clippings came to view. Then I half pushed him into the chair by the table. Unsteadily I walked toward the bathroom.

In the doorway I swung about and watched him. His eyes were glued on those clippings. He bent forward, lifted one—two—three of them, and scanned the headings quickly. Then he dropped back to the first one and read the whole business. I heard his lips smack, saw him look toward me and reach slowly back to his hip pocket.

He never reached the gun. I'd laid the foundation for what was to follow. He saw me coming—came to his feet, jerking at his pocket. And I had him. One hand at his throat, as my right fist pounded down on the flat nose.

He was all soft face and hard heart. No guts. It was his fear as well as my strength that beat him to his knees there on the floor.

"Not me—not me," he choked. It was a cinch that his mind was on those clippings. "Don't—don't!" He tried to scream as my fingers closed tightly about his thoat and my gun thrust forward suddenly into his quivering lips and between his chattering teeth.

I gave him a chance to spit a tooth out —then spoke what was on my mind.

"Where's the girl—where's Beekman?" I asked him.

"I don't know." He shook his head and whimpered there on the floor. And I believed him—believed that he didn't know. Beekman was too cagey a lad to be caught like this—yet; well—I hadn't expected too much.

But I put the fear of Race Williams into his miserable soul.

"You know me. You understand. Two can play at the same game, Mr. Flat-Face. We won't speak of retribution. We won't speak of jail. I won't make empty threats of having anything on you. But you're going to do as I wish tonight—and if you don't, I'll come through alive—as I always come through—then there'll be another clipping from a Florida paper, that you won't be alive to read."

He was thoroughly cowed when I got through with him. He cursed Beekman for sending him to me—and the girl—and the Hidden Hand. But he didn't curse me—was rather polite in that respect.

Beekman did well not to trust such a messenger. I got information from Flat-Face that rang with truth—at least I had to accept it as truth. I had played successfully upon the man's fear —now I tried his greed.

"If we save the girl and get Beekman, there will be a pile of jack in it for you. Death, if you fail—and I'll watch you every minute. Now, tell me again— how does Beekman work this racket with me tonight?" And I made him repeat what he had just told me.

"There's a car below. It's to drive you to Beekman. Where, I ain't been told. I'm to go with ya. That's all I know. I'm to search ya—be sure ya ain't got no hardware."

"And the driver of the car below—does he know?"

"I guess, yes. But you can't stick no gat on him. He's watched. If he leaves his seat or acts queer, Beekman will know."

Very readily—too readily—Flat-Face

agreed to everything I suggested.

The phone rang. It was Beekman. I let Flat-Face talk to him. Flat-Face did his part well—followed my instructions to the letter, telling Beekman that things were fixed and that I had been searched, and was unarmed. I frisked Flat-Face, chucked a gun and a knife under the pillow on the bed—and we were ready to start.

VII

ARM in arm Flat-Face and I left the hotel. No words were spoken as we stepped into the car at the curb. The driver sat stiff and straight behind the wheel. If eyes watched us I did not spot the owner of the eyes. We were off—and I was armed.

"What are your instructions when we reach our destination?" I stuck a forty-five playfully in Flat-Face's ribs.

"I put the gun in your back and lead ya to Beekman," he growled. And then, "I'd be better if ya never come. How you goin' t' beat that part of the program?"

"How many'll be there to—to receive us? If you lie I'll shoot you as soon as we arrive."

He hesitated a moment, looked at me shrewdly and wet his lips before he answered.

"There'll be four. They'll search ya agin. Beekman don't take chances. If there's a shot, he'll get from under—but the girl will be a body. I tell ya, Mister—trust to me—pay me well an' I'll see ya through."

I did have some idea of making a quick stick-up; a few shots and a dash for Beekman. But with four to receive me and Beekman not among the four there didn't seem much chance of rescuing the girl.

"We'll be there soon." Flat-Face cut in on my thoughts. "You're goin' to ya death sure—and me, too. Lis'en, Mister—slip me your rods; turn up without hardware—once with Beekman I'll double-cross him, stick a gun in his back, turn him over to you an' fade from the picture. All I want is a load of jack afterward and a free ride from the state. Whada ya say? Quick!" he whispered, his shrewd, rat-like eyes fastened on the back of the driver's neck through the glass.

And I decided to play a desperate hand. If four men were to search me again, they'd surely find my two big guns. I couldn't watch them and Flat-Face. He only had to wink, to give them the up and up on the real situation. Intently, Flat-Face watched the driver while I did some thinking.

"Hurry, Bozo," Flace-Face was whispering excitedly. "Once in the house it'll be just you, me and Beekman. I'll stick; give me the artillery."

And I did—suddenly slapped both my guns into his hands.

"It's your one chance of freedom," I told him. "If the girl dies, or I die—you're equally guilty with Beekman. And—Gregory Ford already suspects Beekman," I lied.

"Yeh—I know that." He nodded, which surprised me a bit. But he clutched the guns in either hand, and even in the darkness I could see the color begin to come back to his face. He was prepared to double-cross me, I thought—and I was prepared for him to double-cross me. Innocent me? Maybe. Under other circumstances I wouldn't be there, of course. I owed my life to Tina Sears—maybe I'd pay tonight. Maybe I wouldn't. But you know me. I'm no fool. I always have a trick up my sleeve. But one thing I did know—call it instinct; call it a sixth sense; or maybe, under the circumstances, call it just plain common sense. But I did know that sudden and violent death was in the air.

The car stopped on a little road. The driver got out and opened the door. Just darkness, the outline of a house, thick growth, and no figures. There was no attempt to blindfold me; no attempt to keep me ignorant of where I was. It was a cinch that, once I

entered the blackness of the house, the show was over. The curtain would be rung down and I wouldn't walk out again.

The driver of the car was a slow, methodical fellow. He produced a gun most leisurely and placed it against my back. Then, and then only, did two men step from the bushes and confront me. This was a well-laid plan. They even expected that I might flimflam Flat-Face and start shooting the minute I arrived.

It was evident, too, that they weren't satisfied with Flat-Face's search. I stood there with my arms at my sides while one man went through my pockets and another patted my clothes. Then came the orders for my hands up—but I never got them up.

I think I saw the flashing shadow. Anyway, I half-ducked as the arm came through the air and the thud of metal pounded on my head. I staggered under the first blow—and gave with the second. I didn't need to be told what was happening. I half-turned as the second blow fell. Beady of eyes, twisted of lips, cursing vile epithets, Flat-Face struck again.

It wasn't the force of the blow that sent me to the ground. It was reason. As I sunk to the roadway it was in my mind to kill this lad, Flat-Face. I have my own temper, you know. But reason conquered. The girl was still in danger; so far I had accomplished nothing, Besides, now that I was helpless in Beekman's hands he would want to talk with me.

I looked up at the cursing, snarling beast who stood above me. In his hands were both my own guns, covering me. The man was in a passion.

"You'd man-handle me, would you? You'd knock out my teeth, would you? You'd—"

"Don't—you fool!" Two men rushed forward, grabbing at Flat-Face's arms. "Beekman'll want to—"

But the men were not quick enough to knock away the two guns which the infuriated Flat-Face pointed down at me. Once—twice—three times his fingers closed upon the triggers. But there was no report—no shoot of flame. Just a curse from Flat-Face as he broke open the guns and discovered that the cartridges had been removed. I didn't need to tell him I had dropped them on the road before giving him the guns.

It was simply that I wasn't getting the breaks. It wasn't Flat-Face's intelligence or cleverness that rained on my parade—but his passion—that passion which is most men's undoing had served him well. And there's your psychology busted again by fact.

The two men held Flat-Face now, while he pleaded with them to let him do me in. But he finally contented himself by throwing an empty gun in my face and telling them the trick I'd put over on him.

"You dirty, lousy, double-crosser," he bellowed down at me as he kicked me in the chest. "You'll pay for this. You can't beat my face in an' get away with it. No one can." And then turning to the others, "I'm all right now, boys. I'll see the thing through. Don't wise-up Beekman—I want ta be in on this lad's death. If ya tell Beekman I lost my head, one of you'll go in with this yeller bum. Leave him ta me—if trouble ever starts you'll be away an' have an alibi. Come, boys—Race Williams has put us all that much nearer to fryin'. Leave me finish it. I'll cut his—"

There was a sudden silence. I was jerked erect. Crunching feet were beating over gravel.

'What's this—what's this?" The voice was soft and low and I knew it for the voice on the phone—the voice of Beekman. "Not putting up a row. Surely, after coming all this way, Mr. Williams, you don't want to turn back?"

In the blurred darkness I saw the broad, squat figure, the little round eyes, the long, hooked nose, and the double chin that left the idea of a collar in doubt.

"Everything is fit and as it should be?" the soft voice went on. "Mr. Williams has come in peace and carried nothing that would mark him as any but a law-abiding citizen? That is good—come." Alexander Beekman whispered something to one of the men. Flat-Face stepped forward and shoved a rod in my back. A loaded one this time, which he received from one of the boys—and with Beekman taking my arm, we walked along the gravel toward the house.

A single light shone in the hall—not visible until we were mounting the porch.

We were in the hall before I saw the gun in Beekman's hand. He smiled and nodded as I looked at it.

"Between us, Mr. Williams, threats would be idle things, indeed. I hope you will not discourse on future retribution. I assure you that I attend services each Sunday morning and have heard the last word on retribution. Beautiful thoughts for McCleary, Stinnes, and our late over-zealous, and as events proved, over-confident friend, Olaf Sankin.

"But do not think that these deeds of violence have aroused in me a hatred toward you—nor even a fear. Apprehension is the word perhaps. The passing of these three men simply means greater responsibility for me—and with that greater reponsibility, greater—let us not say, pecuniary gain—rather, a remuneration adequate to my efforts. McCleary, Stinnes, Sankin, and now—" he paused a moment and frowned. "And now one called Alexander Beekman."

VIII

UP a flight of stairs we went. Beekman crowded close to me; Flat-Face came along behind and the hard end of a gun was ever against my spine. Beekman didn't speak again until we reached the landing above, passed down a long hall and stood before a door. There he hesitated.

"We must all practice self control." Beekman laid his hand upon the door knob. "Be prepared, then, to show that fortitude for which you are—notorious. I would be very sorry if at this time you should meet with an accident. But I wish you to know that the young lady is—at present—quite well." Beekman swung open the door with the final caution, "The man behind you is nervous and anxious, and if I do not mistake his facial expression, hardly as interested in your immediate future as I."

My head jerked up and my shoulders shot back as Beekman held me from dashing forward. There was Tina—upright in a chair, her feet securely bound, her hands behind her back, her little black bobbed head held erect by a strap, and a white cloth across her mouth.

"As you see, she is quite well," Beekman went on softly. "Warm and comfortable, for there is a fire in the grate."

I looked toward the grate, noted the burning coals, and saw, too, the two irons, the ends of which were a vivid yellowish red. I sucked in a breath and clenched my hands at my sides as I saw that the girl's feet were bare and rested upon a tiny footstool.

"My friend behind you, in his duller days, was an expert with rivets—red hot rivets—but no more. It is unpleasant to speak of and I am sure, unnecessary to contemplate." He left my side and walked to the girl and slightly jerked open her loose blouse—there, just below her throat, were three tiny scratches—evidently made by the point of a sharp knife. "Shall we go below and talk, Mr. Williams?"

"May I have a word with—with the girl?" And despite my efforts, the words stuck in my throat.

Beekman smiled—yet, he didn't know that he was never nearer death than he was at the moment when he touched the girl. There was terror—horror—in those fearful, brown eyes that stared at me.

Beekman hesitated for a second or two, and finally nodded. Then, as if he read my thoughts:

"She will assure you that she has not been, as yet, mistreated."

Alexander Beekman removed the gag from the girl's mouth; motioned me to approach.

"Tina—Tina," I said. "They have not harmed you?"

She sort of swallowed.

"No—no—not yet. But don't believe them—don't tell them anything. No matter what happens, they will kill you and me, and—"

My fingers bit into my palms as Beekman's hand went across her mouth and Flat-Face's gun dug deeper into my back. With a gentle, almost fatherly warning, Beekman removed his hand.

"Mr. Williams is here to save your life, my child. He owes much to you, and will—I am sure—be a gentleman and repay it. You must believe in him and encourage him."

"Yes, Tina. You must believe in me." And I put everything I could into those words. If the girl didn't get it, Beekman did—for he looked at me shrewdly. But he read my words wrong and only nodded.

The girl's face softened slightly as she looked at me. The worn, deep lines seemed to recede, and I bent forward as her lips barely moved. But I caught the words.

"Race, to betray your trust will perhaps make my death easier—but none the less sure. Race—" Hopelessly, fearfully, her eyes shot to Beekman.

He stepped back, lowering his head. I caught her words.

"It's the end." Tina's lips framed the words which I read but did not fairly hear. "I love you."

I leaned forward, my lips close to her ear.

"Buck up, Kid," I barely breathed. "We'll dance on this lad's grave yet."

She heard the words all right, but I don't know if she understood them. Her head turned slightly and her lips brushed my cheek as a gun dug the deeper into my back.

What sensation did I get? One of a great, burning love? Hardly that. I won't go into it. Other things were on my mind. I'll simply say that Tina wasn't a bad kid.

But I did get a chance to nod and wink at the girl as Beekman replaced the gag and Flat-Face forced me to the door at the point of his gun. Her eyes still followed me with fear—and yet, a puzzled sort of fear. After all, was the thing registering with her that Race Williams wasn't exactly a child in arms? But the situation was a delicate and a desperate one. I didn't dare tell her more.

Again the three of us paraded down the stairs, passed through the hall and entered a long library. The shades were drawn, the lights soft, but illuminated the room sufficiently for me to see that no one else lurked in the corners.

Beekman flopped into a chair before a long flat desk, motioned me to the seat opposite, and waved Flat-Face back a few feet where he could have a good shot at my back.

I took one look at Flat-Face, then leaned back in my chair. Beekman was at it again.

"A pretty sentiment, above—Mr. Williams. I envy you your youth and opportunity. The little lady is, indeed, a cute bag of tricks. And her beauty is young and fresh—nothing to mar it but for the scar or two upon her pretty—There, there—" he jerked his chair back, almost knocking the phone from the table as I half shot forward.

But I looked at Flat-Face and leaned back again in my seat. Beekman went on.

"Let us not be melodramatic, Mr. Williams—or if we must be, let us sugar it with common sense. In plain words, you would kill me. Why should I not kill you now that I have you here with me?"

"Because your activities are known—

your connection with a certain party suspected. If anything happens to me, Gregory Ford will know."

"Of course—of course. It is a grand gesture, Mr. Williams. You come here in silly sentiment and with an idea that you can bluff me by your stupid suggestion that Gregory Ford knows of your whereabouts. That Gregory Ford may suspect me is possible—that you have told him or anyone else of your venture tonight, impossible. Yet, you have come. I wonder why.

"For Miss King." I looked him straight in the eye.

"Somehow, I believe you—and with that belief goes my respect for you. After all then, you are simply the common type of thug; a bragging, swaggering gunman." Then sharply, as a pudgy hand fell upon the table. "Come—we waste time. Your freedom and the girl's freedom for the name of the man who has hired you to run me down." He didn't wait for me to answer him. He went right on talking. I listened. He wouldn't be the first man who talked himself into an early grave.

"Certainly," he snapped—the softness out of his voice and a steely hardness taking its place, "I shall not threaten you with physical violence: I know you are a courageous brute. You owe your life to this girl—now her life rests in your hands. It is she who must pay, if you will not talk—and it is you who must watch her pay. Look at me. You know I do not bluff."

And I did know it. I didn't mince words with him.

"Just what do I get in return for giving you the name of my client? And just what assurance do I get—that I get it?"

"You get your freedom and the girl's freedom. So much for the name of the man. And you get the assurance that the girl's secret will be kept. You must take my word. It is useless to discuss it—you have no alternative. And I suspect enough to know if you lie."

"Very well." I looked over at Flat-Face. "Is the boy friend in on the show?"

Alexander Beekman hesitated a moment, then waved Flat-Face to a far corner of the room. But he raised his own gun and placed it against my heart as I leaned over the desk and put my mouth close to his ear.

"The name of the man is Howard Quincy Travers," I whispered steadily.

"God!" he shouted, and sprang to his feet. His face went white, his little round eyes opened and rolled, the chair he had been sitting in crashed to the floor.

IX

IF I had half suspected, I could have had him by the throat and the gun from his hand while his body was between me and Flat-Face. But the next instant the opportunity was gone. Flat-Face called out hoarsely and jumped forward, covering me again; Alexander Beekman half staggered back against the wall. He may have suspected the name—certainly he believed me. But it was a great shock all the same.

As for me—had I betrayed my client? I didn't think so—events would tell. Maybe I'm over confident, maybe I'm too cock-sure—but I thought I had the situation well in hand. Only time could tell.

"Well—" I said, "Anything else you want to know? And why the surprise? You know this man?"

"Yes, yes—I know him." He came back to the desk, but the hand that held the gun trembled. "He is my friend, wormed his way into my confidence, advised me and admonished me in my—money lending. And now—he would betray me into the hands of the law. I thought that he dealt only in the spiritual—not the physical or legal. I am afraid that he can greatly harm me if it is his wish."

"Now, Mr. Beekman," I began to play a few of the cards in my own hand, "if you want facts I'll give them to you.

When I'm through, you'll understand that I did not put my life in your hands when I came here—but that I hold your life in my hands. Dismiss that hyena behind you and I'll talk turkey to you."

The color was beginning to come back to Beekman's face. He looked at me, looked at his gun, and looked toward Flat-Face. Then he motioned him still further away. But a nod of understanding passed between them. Beekman rose, crossed the room and handed his gun to Flat-Face. If he had another he didn't produce it. But he was forestalling all possibilities of getting another shock and having me take the gun from him. As if he had read my mind, he spoke.

"We can talk low now, Mr. Williams. Any attempt on your part to overpower me will bring you instant death." Pulling his chair around close to me and putting me between him and Flat-Face, he said simply— "Proceed. You interest me."

"It's this way." I kept my voice down. "Travers won't betray you to the law unless something happens to me tonight. The hour I disappear, the evidence that will burn you goes to the state."

"Just what evidence?" He was very calm.

"That I don't know."

"You wouldn't.' He nodded emphatically.

"But Travers has the evidence. We have been unfortunate in our dealings. With you, Beekman, we hope for better things. This evidence will never appear against you if you divulge the name of the Hidden Hand."

His eyes widened again.

"To you?" he asked.

"No—to Travers. Give him the name of your leader. Give him the opportunity to rid the state of this monster—and he will help you to freedom."

"Generous—most generous. 'Monster,' eh?" He laughed but his laugh was rather a grating one, and for the moment I wondered if it was possible that, after all, Beekman himself was this Hidden Hand—this unknown leader. But, no—Old Benevolence Travers did not believe that.

For perhaps two or three minutes Beekman drummed his fingers on the desk.

"You hold the cards," he said at length. "I understand better now why you came here tonight. Your client's offer is most generous—and I accept it. And since the police already suspect me, let us go through with the thing tonight. Your client wishes to speak with me. You may send for him now—to come here. If his offer is good and sincere—and knowing the man I most certainly believe in his sincerity—I will blow the show."

"Why—" I hesitated, "I can't run my client into danger."

"But surely he protects his evidence against me with the papers which will be delivered to the law if he should—should meet with an accident."

"Of course." I nodded my agreement. "I'll go bring him here."

"No—no, Mr. Williams. I am a man of impulses. You will telephone him now—the phone there—and you will simply tell him that you have the man—and that the man will talk. You will tell him nothing more—except that you and I are alone."

"And the place?" I said.

"And the place!" He screwed up his face. "Simply say that you await his arrival—at the man's home. You and the girl, of course, will be hostages for his good faith."

"Good." I fell for his smooth tongue like a debutante for a new swear word.

One minute later the voice of Old Benevolence Travers came to me over the wire.

"I am with the man, and he will talk. Come quickly to the man's home—and carefully," I added, before Beekman's hand stretched out and jerked down the connection. That last crack was because I didn't know if the boys outside had gone.

"And now, Mr. Williams," Beekman chuckled while I stood there with the phone still in my hand, "you meet the end, the girl meets the end—and this friend of society meets his end. You have called him to his death. If there are papers, they will be searched out and destroyed—but there will be no papers. First, then, you—" he half turned to Flat-Face.

That was the cue I had been waiting for all the time I was there. I didn't hesitate. The stage was set. I brought my left hand over and down. The heavy telephone crashed upon Beekman's head. He just slunk deeper into the chair, his chin folding up on his chest.

Flat-Face fired as I dropped behind the desk. I heard the glass crash in the heavily curtained window behind me.

"None of that, ya lousy, yeller bum." Flat-Face wasn't over original. He believed in getting one good line and sticking to it. "Come out from behind that desk or I'll plug ya." As innocent as a lamb being led to the slaughter, Flat-Face came on. His feet pounded toward me. The curtain was about to go down on the last act. I did my stuff and pulled down the house. I just popped straight up from behind that desk.

We fired together. But my gun was up and Flat-Face's gun never got any higher than his knees. His bullet crashed against the desk—and mine? Well—there was a tiny hole that was growing and growing right in the center of Flat-Face's forehead. Once he seemed to try to raise his hand—once his mouth opened, but he didn't speak. He sort of sucked at his lips—then slid to the floor like a wet rag.

Under ordinary circumstances I might have played the thing with the sympathetic understanding of a stock company hero, and shot him in the shoulder. But my bullet come out of a twenty-five calibre automatic, which is more or less of a toy if not handled expertly.

Sure! That was the trick I had up my sleeve—literally, not figuratively—a little twenty-five calibre automatic. After all, Flat-Face's passion had been his undoing. His boy friends outside the house were just about ready for me to put my arms up in the air when Flat-Face lost his temper and struck me. You can't hide a rod up your sleeve if your arms are patted while being held in the air. But why bother about that? Certainly, I had done anything but betray my client.

I turned Flat-Face over on his back. He wouldn't worry me any more. He only needed a bit of ground and a shovel. I listened by the door and peered out the window. Then I turned to Alexander Beekman. Old Benevolence Travers would be along in a few minutes—and Beekman and I would be ready to receive him.

The girl was safe enough above. I'd release her just as soon as Travers showed up. I didn't have any handcuffs, or rope with which to tie up Beekman. Besides, it was only a matter of minutes before Beekman would talk.

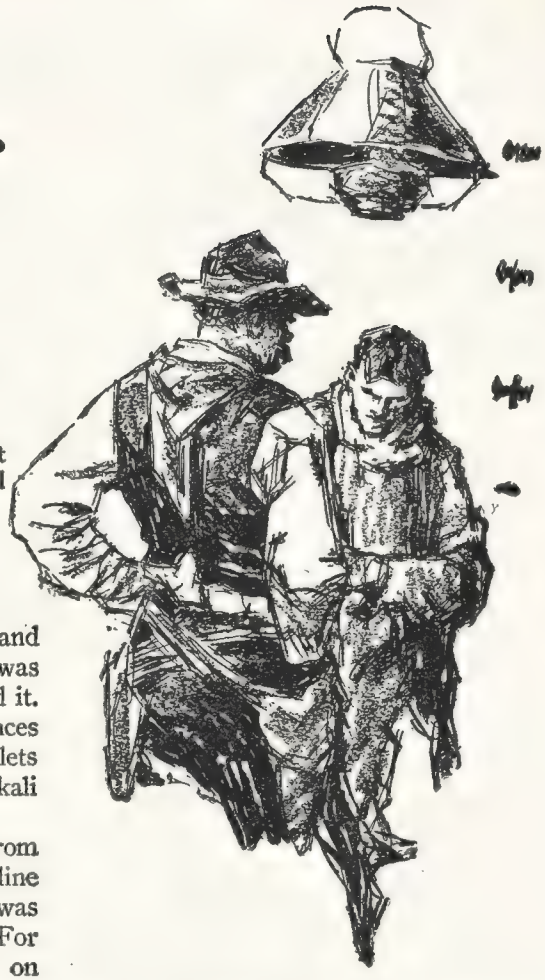
I lit myself a butt and waited. Five—ten—fifteen minutes, at the most, and the name of the Hidden Hand would no longer be a secret, and I—well—this time I had played the game—and there was a fortune in it for me. Beekman was alive—and Beekman would talk. He was that kind of a bird. There was nothing to do but wait. I sent a curl of smoke toward the ceiling. Now—just who would the Hidden Hand turn out to be?

THE LAST SHOT by Carroll John Daly

The final adventure of Race Williams in his fight with the McLeary gang and his search for the Hidden Hand—an adventure packed with swift action and thrills from the first word to the last.

IN OCTOBER BLACK MASK

The Kid Wrangler



By

FRANCIS W. HILTON

He was a big man, a quick shot and a bully, and the Kid looked easy.

WHERE cowland left off and sheepland began a town was built. Difficulty they called it.

To all outward appearances Difficulty was like any of the hamlets dumped haphazardly on the arid, alkali flats of Wyoming.

Yet Difficulty was different from other prairie villages. As the deadline between cowland and sheepland, it was built on a smouldering volcano. For years the few remaining cattlemen on the adjacent No Water range had struggled gamely to survive the overwhelming influx of flockmasters. But inch by inch the dwindling herds were being driven back by the bleating bands which fell like a scourge on the grazing lands. Mile after mile of desolation lay behind the drifting flocks. Drawn-flanked cattle and horses galloped madly from the pungent odor, or lingering taste and smell of sluggish water holes.

The vendetta of the animals extended to the owners. But the cowmen were on their last legs; a mere handful pitted against an invading army. And how Difficulty existed when each trivial incident sent its mixed citizenry clawing for their guns, was a mystery. An eruption was narrowly averted when a band of "Double B" woolies strayed on to grazing land claimed by the "Crescent" outfit, the largest of the remaining cattle spreads in the region. The town still seethed with ill-feeling over the affair when the body of Bill Boyce, who, with his brother Alex, owned the Crescent, was picked up in the street, drilled through the heart.

One clue was all the sheriff had on which to work. That was the word of a frightened boy, an unwilling witness to the shooting.

"The killer was a big feller," was the only description the trembling child could give. "He was totin' two guns but I reckon they're jes' a bluff 'cause he done the shootin' with his left one an' never touched his right."

Two-gun men were no curiosity on the No Water range, although such a freak as a left-handed two-gun man, if still in the country, was bound, sooner or later, to make a slip that would bring about his arrest. As time sped on without trace of the killer, the affair resolved itself into Difficulty's deepest mystery. Cool heads prevented an outbreak and the village settled back into its monotonous existence looking forward only to fall shipping and its attendant celebration and one-day rodeo.

"R'AR up on yore hind legs thar, Scotty, an' sing purty fer the boys!"

The spur rowels of big Riley LaPlant, one-time cowboy, but now camp-tender for the Double-B sheep outfit, jangled noisily as he strode across the "Last Chance" saloon in Difficulty, seized hold of a freckled-faced lad, sitting tilted back against the wall, munching peanuts, and jerked him to his feet.

"Sing er I'll bust ever' bone in yore measly carcass!" LaPlant pulled down a sleeve that had worked up on a powerful, hairy forearm, hooked his thumbs in his cartridge belt, on which two guns were slung, and leered drunkenly at the figure in ragged overalls and runover boots before him.

The young fellow, tall, slender, wiry, hardly more than a boy in appearance, a wrangler for the Crescent outfit, stood uneasily before the half dozen Double-B men who were laughing loudly at LaPlant's latest prank.

"Scotty," they called him for want of another name. He had strayed on to the No Water range the year before on a spavined pony and with a mongrel dog at his heels. Strong as a two-year-old steer, quiet, industrious and likable, was Scotty. As a bronc-fighter for the Crescent, the evil-tempered, hard-drinking LaPlant had taken a violent dislike to the boy. When he had been discharged from the cow outfit for his brutality to horses, he had joined forces with the sheep interests swearing vengeance against all cattlemen and their herds and openly boasting that he would get even with Scotty, who unwittingly had brought about his dismissal.

"Sing for the fellers," snarled LaPlant, plainly bent on goading the lad to some remark to which he could take exception.

"I can't sing, mister," protested Scotty, good-naturedly, edging toward the door.

"Sing, damn yuh, sing!" thundered LaPlant, jerking him back to the bar. "When Riley LaPlant tells a lousy hoss-wrangler to sing, he sings, that's all!"

A savage growl intercepted Scotty's reply. "Lay down, Brownie!" the boy ordered his dog which was snooping about with shoulder hair bristling. The brute slunk back with bared fangs to watch LaPlant from the corner of its eye.

The dog's hostility increased the sheepman's drunken rage. "I hates cows an' anythin' connected with 'em!" he roared. "Are yuh goin' to sing er am I goin' to choke a song outa yuh?"

"I can't sing," repeated Scotty.

LaPlant seized hold of his shoulder. With a vicious bark, the dog hurled itself at the camp-tender's throat. LaPlant reeled under the impact.

"Yuh blank, blank, blank!" he bellowed, kicking the animal savagely in the ribs and whipping out one of his two guns. "This here's the way I treat anythin' as smells a cows." A shot roared through the saloon to crash down upon the group in deafening reverberations. Brownie leaped into the air, then crumpled to the floor, dead!

"Now sing!" LaPlant wheeled on the boy, the blue smoke from his Colt writhing about his head. "Sing er yuh go with him. I hates cows so bad I'll—"

The threat died in his throat. While Scotty had taken the camp-tender's abuse good-naturedly, the killing of his

dog whipped the color from his face. Before the dumfounded LaPlant could swing the gun up for a second shot, Scotty kicked it from his hand and staggered him with a short-arm blow to the chin.

"Yo're drunk, LaPlant," he said contemptuously. "But even so, when yuh kill my dog yuh got me to whip!"

"I'll kill yuh, too, yuh blankety, blank hoss nurse!" Dazed by the unexpected blow, LaPlant clawed blindly for his other gun. His groping fingers closed over the butt, dragged it from its holster. The toe of the boy's boot connected with his wrist to send the weapon flying after its mate.

"Nobuddy's runnin' from yuh," mocked Scotty, jabbing the camp-tender three times in the face before he leaped back.

The Double-B men stared in open-mouthed amazement. For all his disadvantage in size and weight, Scotty was hitting the fuming LaPlant at will.

Shaking his head like an enraged bull, the camp-tender bored in, trying to grapple with his wiry opponent, who would have stood little chance once the great, hairy arms closed about him. Scotty sidestepped to smash him behind the ear as he floundered past. LaPlant wheeled and rushed again. The boy danced around him, landing rapid-fire blows that opened the leathery skin across his cheek, closed one eye and brought the blood gushing from his nose.

"Damn yer hide, I'll kill yuh when I get holt a yuh!" panted LaPlant.

"Yuh ain't got holt a me yet!" taunted Scotty.

As he spoke he set himself, feinted with his left and shot a sizzling right to the point of LaPlant's chin. The camp-tender's head snapped back. He rocked on his heels. His knees began to buckle. Scotty lifted a blow from the floor. It landed with a sickening thud over the camp-tender's heart. LaPlant pitched face downward at his feet.

Without another word the boy walked over to the dog, gathered the lifeless form tenderly in his arms and quit the saloon. The Double-B men watched him go in speechless surprise. The mild-mannered tramp horse-wrangler had whipped Riley LaPlant, terror of the No Water range!

Again the war clouds hovered over Difficulty. The Crescent saved the day by hustling the protesting Scotty back to his cavvy strings. The Double-B owners, too, took a hand in the affair. Allowing the battered LaPlant only time enough to frame an alibi for his defeat, they gave him his choice of going back to work immediately or leaving the country. Swearing vengeance against Scotty, the camp-tender returned to the ranch. Once more Difficulty escaped the bloodshed that sooner or later was bound to come.

DIFFICULTY always dressed up for her rodeo. The weather-beaten buildings blossomed forth in bolts of faded bunting which partially covered the sun-curled bats. Rows of flags strung across the street flapped lazily in the early September breeze. Storekeepers did their annual window decorating.

Cowmen, sheepmen and sod-busters poured in from every direction. Pretty girls decked out in their finest paraded the street on the arms of boisterous escorts. Saloons worked their heavy-eyed bartenders in relays. Families squatted in the scanty shade to munch the lunches they had brought along and exchange greetings with friends in the passing crowd. Restaurants catered to a never-ending stream of ravenous patrons. Difficulty dragged off the lid. The sky was the limit!

Shortly after noon lumber wagons with plank seats began running to the fair grounds, a mile from town. One o'clock found Difficulty deserted and silent save for the thunderous applause that drifted in from the packed grandstand at the rodeo grounds.

"Riley LaPlant! Riley LaPlant!" A

welter of praise rolled across the field to batter itself to a whisper against the chalk bluffs to the west. "Our money's on yuh!"

Unlike rodeos of other years when hard-riding cowboys kept the spectators on the edge of their seats with their daredevil stunts, Difficulty's celebration now was a tame affair in which sheepmen took the leading part. Between contests, LaPlant, the ex-cowboy, decked out in a blazing silk shirt, gaudy neckerchief and conchas-trimmed chaps, rode back and forth in front of the stand. He drew rein occasionally to hook his thumbs in his cartridge belt near his two guns and wise-crack at the crowd. From the wild horse race to the pitching contest the show was his. He was the hero of the day; the idol of the excited sheepmen, who, save for a sprinkling of cowmen, packed the stands and cheered each time they caught a glimpse of him through the billows of dust that arose from the track to powder faces and streak dainty gowns with grime.

"Next is the Three-Mile Relay Race!" shouted the perspiring announcer with a handkerchief tucked in his wilted collar. "Six hosses to the string. Five saddle changes. Riley LaPlant's the only entry. We've let down the bars fer two to start. If we can't get somebuddy we'll hafta call off the race."

A hush fell over the crowd, followed by a groan of disappointment. The relay race, the last event on the program, was by far the chief attraction.

Suddenly a commotion back of the judges' stand brought the track loafers on the run to investigate.

LaPlant had encountered Scotty wandering aimlessly about with his hands rammed into his overall pockets. Having convinced himself in a swift glance that the kid wrangler was surrounded by sheepmen, LaPlant grew cocky.

"Yuh damned brat!" he sneered. "Why don't yuh get into the races an' get yore feet wet? They ain't a cowman on the grounds that's got guts enough to ride agin me in this relay race."

"I'd ride agin yuh if I had a string, yuh dirty four-flusher," threw back Scotty hotly, stopping in his tracks and facing the camp-tender. "Never seen the day no ticky woolie rassler could buffalo me. I'll whip yuh afoot er hoss-back, but I ain't got no nags to top."

While the boy was speaking, LaPlant took down his rope. Before Scotty realized what he was about, the noose sang through the air and settled over his arms, pinioning them to his side. He was almost jerked from his feet as the camp-tender struck spurs to his horse and pushed through the crowd to the front of the stand.

"Here's an entry!" the camp-tender boomed. "R'ar up on yore hind legs yuh damned hoss wrangler an' show the folks how tough yuh are. He'll ride the relay agin me if somebuddy'll stake him to a string. To hell with the cowmen!" LaPlant threw at the crowd. "A hundred dollars side bet I can skin this hoss wrangler, er any other man they got, hands down at relay ridin'!"

An ominous hush fell over the grandstand. Sheepmen cast furtive glances at the few cattlemen who sat grinding their teeth at their impotence.

"I'll call that bet, yuh damned trouble-maker!" The voice of Alex Boyce, owner of the Crescent, arose hoarsely. "A hundred dollars Scotty, er any other Crescent man, can beat a four-flusher like yuh relay ridin'."

He broke his way down through the jammed tiers and ran on to the track. "Yo're the one who's been stirrin' up mosta the hell on this range ever sincst yuh hit it. Now, damn yuh, let's see if yo're yaller like yuh was when Scotty whipped yuh fair an' square!" He wheeled on the wrangler who had slipped from the noose. "The Crescent'll stake yuh to a string," he thun-

dered. "Ride yore best, Scotty, that's all a cowman needs to do to show this damned camp-tender that we ain't takin' nothin' from sheep-herdin' jaspers like him."

Scotty bowed timidly to the cheering crowd and hoisted his dirty overalls. A salvo of bawls followed him as he quit the track with Boyce, leaving the raging LaPlant gulping and staring after them.

The wrangler returned presently, dragging a stock saddle. In a short time two strings of six horses each were led on to the track and bunched in separate groups along the rail, each herd in charge of a helper. The handful of cowmen cheered Scotty. The sheepmen drowned them out shouting for LaPlant.

"Scotty, the kid wrangler, ridin' agin Riley LaPlant in the Three-Mile Relay Race!" bawled the announcer to make himself heard above the deafening bleats and bellows ascending from the stand. "Scotty's forkin' a string the Crescent staked him to. LaPlant's straddlin' Double-B nags!"

Oblivious to the thunderous applause, Scotty and LaPlant saddled their first horses. The cow section went mad when the wrangler swung up, tried the stirrups with the air of a man accustomed, then galloped abreast of LaPlant, who had mounted and was sitting sidewise in his saddle, a sneer on his face.

"After I call Boyce's bluff I'm goin' to mop up this field with yuh an' show that boss a yor'n that sheepmen don't take insults from cow rasslers," snarled the camp-tender. "I'll—"

The crack of the starter's gun cut him short. Down the track they went, neck and neck.

"A sheep racin' a cow!" barked the announcer as the grandstand upheaved with a gigantic roar. "Riley LaPlant, once a cowman now playin' with woolies, off to a flyin' start with the kid wrangler. Jes' watch that cowhand go!"

The quarter post! Many of the mocking bawls turned to exclamations of surprise. It took but a glance to see that Scotty was a horseman of no ordinary ability. The easy movement of his body was giving his mount the edge over LaPlant's, which, although undoubtedly the faster of the two, was running sideways under the awkward bulk of its rider.

They swung into the home-stretch. Scotty picked up a lead only to lose it as LaPlant's pony spurted under the slashing rowels.

A deep silence fell on the crowd as the two floated past the grandstand, dragged their horses to their haunches beside the strings and jerked off their saddles to toss them on to the relay mounts led forward by the helpers. Slow seconds tightened nerves to the snapping point. Then a clatter of hoofs. Out of the choking cloud of dust Scotty thundered away on a new horse, buckling his latigo as he went. A minute behind was LaPlant, whipping from the start.

The crowd screamed itself hoarse. The few lingering bawls were drowned in a mighty roar of approval.

Again the ominous silence and the swirling mass of dust that obscured both riders and horses. Then the sudden pounding of hoofs. LaPlant had re-saddled and was gone. Scotty started a length behind.

At the quarter the camp-tender was lacing the blood from his mount to hold the lead. Scotty was creeping up without whip or spur. LaPlant's lips were twisted in a snarl. He was forking the fastest string on the No Water range, yet try as he would he could not shake the easy-riding wrangler hammering at his heels. The stretch! Three more horses to saddle and go! LaPlant could hear Scotty's mount blowing. He glanced over his shoulder. The boy swept past. A savage curse sprang to his lips. The wrangler had uncinched and was holding his saddle on by the horn!

Recognizing the advantage of the trick and ignoring the risk, LaPlant reached for his own latigo and jerked it loose. His mount shied. Before the camp-tender could regain his balance the saddle slipped back on to his horse's rump. The brute stopped dead in its tracks. LaPlant could hear the crowd cheering Scotty, who had gone off over his mount's head to light running beside his string, saddle in hand. Slashing his frightened pony with the rawhide and opening its sides with his rowels, the camp-tender finally succeeded in reaching his string just as Scotty got away in a billow of dust.

LaPlant delayed long enough to say something to the helper who led up the next horse, then saddled and raced forth, a quarter behind. Turning the bridle reins of the two remaining horses over to another Double-B man, the helper ducked into the crowd and headed for the barns which housed a small livestock exhibit. Wondering at the move, yet too excited to question it, the throng turned to cheer Scotty, who was thundering down the stretch.

The fifth change was made with lightning speed. The wrangler was in the saddle and gone before LaPlant reached the stand. Groans from the sheepmen and hisses from the cowmen greeted the camp-tender as he pounded up. Scotty already was well on his way!

The sixth and last change! Only by a miracle could LaPlant overcome the wrangler's lead. But something had happened at the quarter post. Scotty's mount slid to a halt, snorted through flaring nostrils, threaded its nose between its fetlocks and went into the air like a rocket. A shaggy-haired ram sauntered up an embankment on to the track and stood surveying the field with interest!

From the corner of his eye Scotty caught sight of La Plant's helper bellying his way through the brush back around the track. Just then his horse landed like a stone-crusher in front.

"LaPlant framed us!" he could hear the cowmen roaring. "His helper turned that ram loose a purpose to scare our hoss!"

The bedlam of shouts and curses that arose was lost to Scotty, who was fighting stubbornly to stay with the pitching horse. He had only time to clutch hold of its mane as the loosely cinched saddle turned. A few vicious lunges and the latigo broke. Saddle and blanket dropped to the ground.

LaPlant flashed past. A guffaw drifted back to the wrangler. The horse was spinning like a top, catapulting into the air, landing on one leg at a time, giving him four terrific jolts. The mad gyrations set his head to swimming. The stiff-legged bouncing sent pains shooting through his body. Yet he clung like a cockle-burr, now gazing down on the field, again catching glimpses of it above.

Having looked things over, the ram sauntered leisurely across the grounds. Scotty's horse bawled like a frightened calf, stopped its pitching, bolted from the sheep's path and fled straight down the track. Without saddle, and with the weight of its rider distributed evenly along its back, it ran free and unhampered. As LaPlant turned into the home-stretch it pushed its flaring nostrils up to his mount's flank.

Suddenly a fearful silence fell like a stroke on the field. Before a cloud of dust shut the two riders from sight Scotty's horse went down, end over end. The crowd waited for LaPlant to plunge from the blinding, choking mantle and flash abreast, the winner. But LaPlant never came. Instead, a shot rang out and his riderless horse galloped under the wire, empty stirrups beating a tattoo against its ribs.

Back on the track stretched two motionless forms. The crowd broke for them. A doctor came running up. Alex Boyce and the sheriff plowed through the tight-packed mass.

"Give 'em air! Give 'em air!" cried the doctor.

"Get back! Get back!" roared the

sheriff and Boyce, bucking the line. "Didn't yuh never see men hurt before?"

Scotty shook himself like a dog coming out of water, raised on one elbow across which the blood was streaming, and began shouting wildly.

"What's he sayin'?" demanded Boyce.

"Hurt his head and is raving!" replied the doctor. He stooped over the writhing boy.

LaPlant shuddered back to consciousness, stared about dully.

"He dragged me down!" he choked, clawing the dirt from his mouth. "I had the race won. His horse fell. He jumped on me an' throwed my nag off balance. I'll kill him fer it!"

His hand fell to one of his holsters. It was the left and was empty! At that moment the light of sanity blazed in Scotty's eyes. Pushing the doctor aside, he reeled to his feet, one arm dangling helplessly at his side.

"Shore I dragged him down after he'd crowded my hoss over," he shouted. "Jes had time to jump an' I jumped lucky." He crumpled back to his knees. "Then he plugged me. Look at the gun that's missin'! It's his left holster that's empty! Can't yuh see! He can't use his right gun! He shot my dog in the Last Chance with his left, too. I didn't notice it then. But now I know. Arrest LaPlant. He killed Bill Boyce! A left-handed, two-gun man's what yuh been huntin' fer, sheriff. He—" His voice failed. He pitched face downward in the dusty track.

Seizing hold of LaPlant, Boyce jerked him to his feet, where he stood swaying uncertainly.

"He's tryin' to frame me 'cause he knowed he was beat!" cried the camp-tender hoarsely. "I didn't kill Bill Boyce ontil after he'd shot first!"

"Bill Boyce shot first!" echoed the sheriff. "An' yuh admit killin' him?"

"Not ontil after he'd shot first," snarled LaPlant. "It was self-defense. This lousy wrangler's tryin' to frame me."

"I thought so," chimed in the white-faced Alex Boyce. "An' yuh-all know there weren't a shot fired outa Bill's gun when we found him. I never knowed a man to be as mean as this feller without doin' murder. An' damn yuh, yuh got yore helper to turn loose that ram to scare the kid's hoss."

The sheriff elbowed the cowman aside and seized hold of LaPlant. "If yuh'd 'a' kept yore mouth shut we'd 'a' figgered Scotty was jes ravin'." he growled. "We never even suspected yuh. But it's a cinch yuh shot that kid with yore left gun, 'cause it's missin' an' yuh was packin' two. Can't yuh use the other'n?"

LaPlant only eyed him in sullen silence.

"Long as yuh've spilled yore guts I reckon yo're the hombre we're huntin'!" barked the officer. "Hold them cowmen 'a' yor'n back, Boyce," he threw at the Crescent owner. "If we all use our heads now we can settle this thing without any more trouble. Open up there. One break an' somebuddy goes down!" Holding the growling cowmen at bay with his gun, he hustled LaPlant through the crowd.

"Keep yore heads, fellers!" pleaded Alex Boyce. "Fer God's sake don't start nothin' er Difficulty an' the No Water range'll run blood. The law's got brother's killer right there. Let it take care a him."

In spite of his frantic exhortation, the cowmen surged forward. The sheriff dragged the prisoner to safety, mounted the first horses he reached and quit the field at a mad gallop.

"Give Scotty air! Give Scotty air!" cried the doctor. "He's shot bad. We'll have to get him to town. Give me a heft!"

"Heft, hell!" mumbled Scotty. "Gimme my hoss an' lemme show that danged woolie rassler that cowmen can still beat hell outa sheepmen at anything!"

Crooks in Arcady

By TOM CURRY

Mac's business was crook catching; but when a man is on his vacation he tries to forget business.

I WAS tired of it—said Mac. Yes, tired of crime, sick of the unending battle with the crooks. I had just wound up a big case, and it was time for my vacation. Last year I went to Atlantic City but that was too noisy. Thinks I, I'll go way off in the country somewhere and just sit around for two weeks.

So I found a little hotel up in the mountains of Pennsylvania, near the bank of a river, several miles from a railroad station, and I packed a grip and jazzed up there.

There weren't more than thirty guests at the place, and they were most of them there for the same reason I was—to rest. Old ladies sat on the porch, knitting, and the green lawns and the woods called to be walked in.

The air was sweet, there was a cool breeze coming over the hilltop. Peace, no more crooks for two weeks!

I was ready for bed by nine-thirty, and I went upstairs, washed and got into my sleeping clothes. I put out my light, and drifted off to sleep.

It must have been midnight when I was disturbed. I lay there, looking at the moonlight streaming in at the window, wondering why I had waked up. Then I heard noises in the next room.

They annoyed me. I couldn't figure out what they were. At last I got up and tiptoed over to the connecting door.

The sounds stopped, then started again. And I saw the end of a bit coming through the wood near the bottom hinge.

I tapped on my side of the door. The bit stopped, and I heard hurried footsteps cross the adjoining room, the quick opening of a door, and then silence. And I went back to bed. "Some nut," I thought. Of course if I'd been back in the city on the job I

might have suspected something, but not here, on my vacation.

I intended complaining about the person in the next room. So I found the manager, and told him about what had happened.

"That's Mr. House," says he. "He's been here two weeks. Queer, there's been no complaints about him before. He's been very quiet and well-behaved. I'll speak to him."

"So'll I," says I.

Mr. House was not in evidence all day. I had had a good look at him the previous night. I started upstairs about eight-thirty—the country air surely makes a man sleepy—and as I walked along the hall toward my room, I saw the fellow, tall, slim, with brown hair and a thin face—starting to open his door.

"Hey!" I called, wishing to tell him what I thought of his behavior.

He gave one startled look at me, and then he ran like a rabbit for the other end of the building. He shot round a corner, and disappeared. I shrugged my shoulders, said "Nut" to myself again, and went to bed. I was not disturbed that night.

Mr. House, as he was known, seemed to have gone for good. For two days, he did not appear.

"That gentleman next door to you has left, without notice," says the manager, after supper the third day. "His rent's due, too."

He might have gone on, but I was not interested in the crazy bird who had annoyed me. I went out for a walk in the pine forest.

I had got to like those evergreens. It was easy walking on the brown needles, where not much brush grew. I wandered along, smoking, having a fine time.

"Crack!"

A stick had broken, off to my right. It was practically dark now, and I thought I had better be starting back to the hotel, as I didn't want to get lost. I turned on my heel, and strolled toward the lights which I could just see through the trees.

I had not gone more than ten yards, when men leaped out at me from either side, and pulled me down before I could yell more than once. A great big fellow had me by the throat, and they tied my hands and thrust a gag in my mouth in a jiffy.

Did they intend going through my pockets, I wondered. I had to laugh to myself, for all my money except a little change I had left behind in the hotel. They would not get much for their trouble.

But instead of robbing me, or trying to, they pushed me ahead—there were two of them, and one I thought was the man known as House.

They marched me through that pine forest for half a mile, and finally we came out on to a dirt road. In the ditch was standing a car, and they shoved me inside, the big guy sitting beside me with a gat in his hand, and the fellow called House, nervous, scared of his shadow, at the wheel.

Beyond cursing me, and socking me once or twice, nothing had been said or done, to give me the least idea of what it was all about.

This was a nice way to spend a vacation, thinks I.

Well, we drove on and on, to the northwest. The country got wilder and wilder, and we passed a few houses, and only one or two little villages. We were climbing up through the mountains all the time. We crossed streams and cut along the sides of precipices.

At last, they turned up a rough, two-track trail, and finally, well in the bush, they left the car, with me in tow.

"Get along there, you dog," growled the big black-haired man who was my special guardian. He kicked me ahead of him, and I struggled up the slope.

Then, I saw a tent before me. A couple of squat little men came forward to meet us. They were foreigners, with long brown mustaches, and they took orders from the big guy.

"Keep him there," ordered this one.

They called him Schauber, and I had heard House address him as Louie. However, this meant nothing in my young life.

The two were evidently to hold me in the camp. They had a fire going, and there were cots in the tent. They took the gag out of my mouth. I had no arms on me, but they went through me anyway.

"What's the idea?" I yelped, when I could speak. "What's the game? You'll regret this, let me tell you that."

"Shut up, you," growled Schauber, and slapped me one. I tried to get at him, but they pushed me back into the tent and made me lie down on a cot.

Finally, Schauber and House went away, leaving me under the guard of the two foreigners. I could hear them talking outside in their own tongue, and I tried once to get up and slip under the side of the tent; but they were on me in a minute. One of them patted a rifle he had, smiling at me as he did so, and I knew he meant he would let me have it if I tried to escape.

I went to sleep finally, in spite of everything. The morning sun woke me bright and early. I was given breakfast, and allowed to walk around and stretch myself.

ALL day they kept me there. Evening fell. I had gone into the tent about five o'clock, to take a little nap. When I woke up, I stretched myself and stepped out.

My captors were not in sight. I thought maybe they were just hiding in the bushes, and that if I tried to make a break for it, they would either shoot me down or catch me. So I hung around for a couple of hours, expecting them to appear any minute.

I was hungry. I looked for food, but found they had cleaned out everything before leaving.

The game had me cock-eyed, I'll tell you. What the idea was, was beyond me.

But at last I decided that they had gone for good, and I started down the mountain path, stepping along gingerly, because I had an idea maybe it was what they wanted me to do, so they would have an excuse to plug me.

However, I made the two miles back to the dirt road, without being shot at. And then I started to canter along, hoping to reach a house or be picked up by a passing car, before dark came.

About nine o'clock, I came out on to a tar road, and saw a farm house. I knocked at the door, and asked my way. They told me I was twenty miles from the hotel. They telephoned for a car for me, and I got back to the hotel, foot-sore and dead tired, about eleven.

I had picked up something to eat on the way, so I started upstairs to my room. The whole business had my goat. I could not guess what it was all about.

The hotel was quiet; the night clerk was dozing in his chair. He nodded to me as I passed him.

I fitted my key in the lock. It would not turn to open the door; but the lock was already undone. I must have forgotten to lock it, says I to myself, and stepped inside. I found the light switch, and pressed it.

I had my coat half off, before I chanced to glance in the mirror. And covering me with a .45 automatic pistol was the big guy, Louie Schauber. Behind him, nervous as a cat, was House.

"Well, for the love of heaven," says I. "How did you get here?"

"Keep your voice down," snarled Schauber. "Don't make a break or I'll give it to you. Sit down."

I sat on the side of the bed, and glared at them. "What's the big idea?" I asked. "Are you two goofy? Why are you following me around this way?"

Schauber sneered at me. "Smart, ain't you, Detective Macnamara," says he. "A wise guy all the way through. Well, where is it?"

"Where's what?" I asked, surprised

he knew my name. I had never seen either of those boys before.

"You dog," says House, in his cracked voice. "Where is it? Tell us, or we'll give it to you."

"I'll handle him, kid," says Schauber.

He came over to me and gripped my wrist. House held a gun on me.

The big fellow twisted my wrist back, and threw me over on my stomach. He put his knee in my back, and shoved my head down into the mattress, so's I couldn't yell.

"Come clean," he ordered, giving me the business.

I fought back at him, and tried to cry out; but he held me tight.

At last, Schauber got tired of his game, and let up on me. "Listen," says he, eagerly, "we'll give you a split. Only put us wise where you got the loot hid, and we'll divvy and beat it. You can say we got away clean."

"I wish you would get away," I growled. "But I don't know anything about any loot."

They wouldn't believe me. "You're crooked," says House. "Otherwise you'd have pinched me and taken the stuff back to New York. Sure."

It was slowly leaking out. House alone, or House and Schauber, had pulled a job, and House had come up here with the swag to lie low for a while. He had seen me, thought I had come to collar him, and run for his life. Now, the loot he had left behind and tried to regain, had been taken and they thought I had it.

"Someone else must have got it," says I. "I never knew you had it. I never recognized you, House. Don't know your racket or anything else about you."

"What?" he yelped. "You don't know me? 'Bondy' House?"

Now he mentioned his nickname, I realized I had heard of him. "Bondy" House was a white-collar crook, had run bucket-shops, played messenger, and got away with several big jobs.

House was insulted. To think I had not known him! What was the use in being a famous crook, when a dick did not chase you on sight? It hurt his feelings. But I had never worked on him, and it was not exactly in my line.

"I told you I'd get the loot for you, and I will," says Schauber, breaking in on House's curses.

Schauber was another type of criminal. He was rough, a man of violence. "Sure," growled House. "Scrag the bum again, Louie. That's what I let you in for."

"Come on, Macnamara," says Schauber, trying to look pleasant. "Two hundred grand'll go a long way. Good bonds, every one of 'em, and we can clean up forty grand apiece."

I was looking at the door, which led into the next room. There was the little hole House had bored when he had first thought to watch my moves. I caught the gleam of an eye through it, and listening intently, heard a slight movement. Somebody else was there!

Who was it? Two hundred grand in good bonds would attract a lot of flies. Maybe it was the man or men in the next room who had grabbed the stuff while House was running away from his shadow.

I said nothing to the two crooks about it, however. I just waited.

"House left the stuff in his room next door," Schauber was saying. "He ran from you. Tried to get back after it a couple of times, and bumped into you. So he gets me. We kidnaped you, returned here and slipped in without being seen, and found the stuff was gone. So we got in your room here and waited for you to come back."

They had spent some time going through my effects. Collars, shirts, socks and so on were strewn about the room, and they had even pulled the bed apart.

"Maybe you think I'm a damn fool, Louie," House was saying. "But when a man's hiding out and a headquarters dick comes to a hangout like this, why, what do you expect? I was sure he

was hot on me, watching for the loot, thinking I didn't know him. Why, I know every one of the dirty bums."

Schauber sat for some time, trying to make the wheels go round in his thick skull. "There's only one thing to believe, House," says he, "and dat's dis dickie has the stuff salted away for himself. Sure, he's gonna say we got away, and keep the stuff!"

House would have believed anything. "Give it to him," he urged.

Schauber was lashing himself into a rage. He grabbed me and held me in a stranglehold, digging me with his fists. He drew a knife, and pricked me in the ribs, and cursed me under his breath. I gave a faint cry; I tried to fight back, as he was hurting me badly. But he had a grip of iron.

I thought he would knock me out at least. I was tired, and sick. Schauber didn't let up on me; he was sore, and was torturing me.

"Where's the stuff?" he kept saying.

House came over and slapped me viciously. He was angry because I had not caught his mug. He thought every dick in the country knew him, and was watching for him. Lots of them feel that way; self-important.

"I'm gonna let you have it," snarled Schauber, at last. "By God, maybe we won't get the loot but neither'll you, dickie!"

I don't know whether he'd have croaked me or not; certainly the pain was terrible. I couldn't breathe. I couldn't even squeak. The knife slashed the skin over my ribs and I was bleeding there.

"STICK 'em up!"

The order came from the door which led into the room House had occupied. It had opened softly, without alarming the crooks, who were intent on me. They both had their backs to that door, and two men came through it, men I recognized with a thrill of pleasure. They were New York detectives, from a downtown station. One was named Franks, the second was his partner, Flint. Both were first-grades, well known in their line, which was bond thieves. Flint was a great big fellow, Franks smaller, lithe and strong. I had never worked with them, but had often seen them during the line-up and talked with them now and then.

"So," says Franks, "we've got you, House. Been after you a long time. What's going on?"

The crooks had dropped their weapons at the detectives' order, and stood with upraised hands, their mouths open.

"Damnation," says the bond thief. "Now we are in hot water! How'd you boys get here? Did Macnamara send for you?"

"Not at all," says Franks pleasantly. "Never knew Mac was here, Bondy. We have been looking for you ever since you pulled that Sinter job three weeks ago. I picked you up on Broadway two days ago, and trailed you up to the woods near here, Schauber with you. Lost you when I went to phone for Flint. We came to this joint, found you'd been here but had evaporated. Been hanging around ever since, and got in your room tonight and peeked in on you here. Thought we'd save Mac. Where's the stuff?"

"Huh?" cried House. "Have't *you* got it? Why, when you came in, I thought we had been wrong about this sap here having it; thought you fellows had snaffled it."

"No, no. We heard you trying to work it out of Macnamara, and couldn't guess your game. Better come across, it'll be easier for you in the long run. You ought to know that, House."

"If anybody knows where the damn bonds are, then it's Macnamara," growled House. "He's been up here for several days, and he was here when the bonds disappeared. That's all I know. Figure it out; you're detectives."

Schauber had been working around bit by bit toward the other room, the door of which was open. Franks and

Flint, both stumped, had been talking to House.

"Look out," I called, as Schauber stooped suddenly.

Both swung on their heels, gats ready; Schauber, reaching down and picking up his pistol, fired at them, and Flint let out a cry and dropped his gun. House, like a flash, ran for the door, but I put out my foot and tripped him. He crashed mightily, and I fell on him.

Franks fired at Schauber, as the big fellow went through the open door.

"I've got this one," I called. "Get Schauber!"

But the husky crook, though wounded by Frank's fire, ran out into the hall and beat it down the stairs, lickety-split.

Flint groaned. He was badly hit. The whole hotel was by this time in pandemonium. The night clerk tried to stop Schauber as the big man dashed for the outside. But Schauber, brandishing his gun, knocked him down and stepped on him, and disappeared in the night. Glancing out the window, gripping House by the wrist, I saw Schauber's thick figure making for the pine forest. I shot after him once, but then Franks came in sight, hot on the trail.

The hotel employees appeared, and frightened guests clad in dressing gowns were peeking around their doors.

"Get a doctor," I ordered, when the manager and his men came in. "Hurry. And someone hold this fellow for me. I'm Detective Macnamara, of the New York police. This fellow is a crook. Don't let him get away. One of my friends is chasing another of them through the woods, and I've got to help him."

"He's a liar!" cried House, throwing a bluff. "He's a crook himself."

But I flashed my credentials, and they did as I ordered. Then I ran for the outdoors, to help Franks.

I heard a shot from the direction of the pine woods and, with Flint's gun in my hand, started that way. I ran as hard as I could, and hit the trees. I stopped now and then to listen. Another shot reached me. Franks was pressing the big fellow closely.

I had gained some on them. I listened again, and heard noises a couple of hundred yards off to my right. I went that way, and broke out into a clearing. In the center of it two figures were gripped in a death struggle. It was Schauber and Franks, having it out.

But the detective, while strong, was no match for the heavy Schauber. The latter was already on top, and was getting ready to finish off my friend when I shot out into the open space.

I made a jump for Schauber's neck, and flattened him out, getting the stranglehold and tearing him off Franks, who was all in.

The blood from the wound in Schauber's side was gushing out fast. But the big man fought on, like a wounded lion. He cursed me, and, reaching back over his head, grasped my hair and pulled me up on to his shoulders. Then he rose, trying to fling me over his head. I twined my legs round his waist, and held on. He staggered a few steps, and then fell heavily on me, rolling me under his body.

It knocked the wind out of me. I had lost the pistol in the fuss, and I saw Schauber stagger to his feet and break into the underbrush on the other side of the pine forest.

I groped around and found my gun and started after him. But I was about through. I guess he hid and I passed him or I took the wrong turn, for I heard nothing of him again. I had to turn around and retrace my steps.

When I reached the clearing, Franks was gone. He had returned to the hotel.

Flint was badly hurt. The doctor was dressing the wound when I got there. I was not in such good shape myself, and Franks, when he greeted me, was blue in the face and had several long gashes on his body.

"We've got to find Schauber," says

he. "If Flint dies, it'll be a murder job, Macnamara."

After we had rested, the two of us started out. We snatched a cup of coffee about six in the morning, after beating through the woods for several hours.

We found Schauber's trail as daylight came, as he had been bleeding badly. He had reached the highway, however, and we discovered, on inquiring at the sheriff's, that he had stuck up and taken away a car from a passing farmer. We got the number and description, and went on.

I had a hunch. "Listen, Franks," says I. "He's wounded; he'll need help. Now, he's got some friends in a mountain camp not far from here. Let's take a chance on that."

So we went toward the spot where I had been held a prisoner. Hidden in the bush, where the little track up into the hills left the dirt road, we found the small car which Schauber had stolen. The front seat was covered with dried blood.

We went on up the trail. The location where the tent had been was deserted; but we beat about, enlarging our radius, and at two in the afternoon we smelled smoke and caught a glimpse of the tent through the trees. I saw one of the foreigners who had been my captors, heating water at the fire.

We closed in, and stuck a gun under the little man's nose. His pal came from the tent, and we got him, too. Inside, on a cot, was Schauber, delirious. They had been treating him, dressing his wound.

We rigged up a stretcher, put Schauber on it, and the little foreigners one at each end, and started down the mountain. By five p.m. we were back at the hotel, and had Schauber a prisoner and under care.

Well, maybe you can guess how I felt. No sleep to speak of, for two nights, several battles, and a bunch of cuffs were what I counted.

Flint was better, and out of danger.

"The question is, where's that loot?" Franks kept saying.

"I don't know, and I don't care," says I. "I'm going back to New York. Some vacation!"

Franks shook his head. "Wish you'd give me a hand, Mac," he said. "I'd like to trace those bonds. D' you suppose some other crook came along and grabbed them?"

"Who knows," says I.

I lay down and slept for fifteen hours. When I awoke I felt a little better; but the woods had lost all charm for me. I could feel Schauber sitting on my neck, socking me in the jaw or pulling my hair out by the roots.

However, I sat down and thought it out. Then I had an inspiration. I called Franks, who had just woke up.

Together we went down to see the hotel manager.

"Listen," says I, "what did you do with Mr. House's baggage, when he didn't come back and pay his rent?"

"Why," says the manager, "it's in that closet over there. One of the boys was sent up to bring it down; we would hold it for a time, until House came back and paid his bill; if not, it would be opened and the contents sold."

"Let's see it," says I.

He sent a boy for the two brown bags; and when we opened them, packages of green bonds fell out all over the floor. They had been lying there in that closet ever since House first beat it from me, thinking I had come to collar him!

"There you are," says I to Franks.

That was the first part of my vacation. I caught a train back to New York and spent the rest of the time at home.

SUPERCROOK, by TOM CURRY, in OCTOBER BLACK MASK

Pipe-Smoking Doctor Claims Time Record for This Tobacco

Says he has smoked this brand for twenty-five years

Evidently we "started something" in publishing pipe-smoking records of old-time members of the Edgeworth Club.

Here is a doctor who writes in from Oregon to tell the world that he has smoked Edgeworth steadily and exclusively for a quarter century.

Any smoking tobacco that holds a man's affection that long must have some quality that commends it to others. Here's the letter in which Dr. Delepine claims the record:

St. Helens, Oregon
March 15, 1927

Larus & Bro. Co.,
Richmond, Va.

Gentlemen:

I noticed with a good deal of amusement the challenge of Mr. J. J. Roberts of Columbia, S. D.

For my own part, I must confess to having smoked Edgeworth steadily for the last 25 years. I began before you had started putting up the "ready rubbed" kind, or at least before it was on sale in the Far West. I smoked your Plug Cut for two or three years. Then I switched to the "ready rubbed" as more convenient, but identical in flavor, and I have used it ever since.

So you may tell Mr. Roberts, with my compliments, that although he has done well and wisely, he is far from being the champion he fancies himself; and for my part, with my better showing, I expect to be a long way behind many others.

Yours very truly,
C. V. Delepine, M. D.

Men don't get into good-natured rivalry about a thing unless they like it. And they must like Edgeworth because there is so much of the friendly competition about who has smoked it longest (thus making him long-time champion of the Edgeworth Club).

But there are still a lot of potential champions who haven't yet put their first light to a pipeful of Edgeworth.

To them we make this "one-man-to-another" offer:

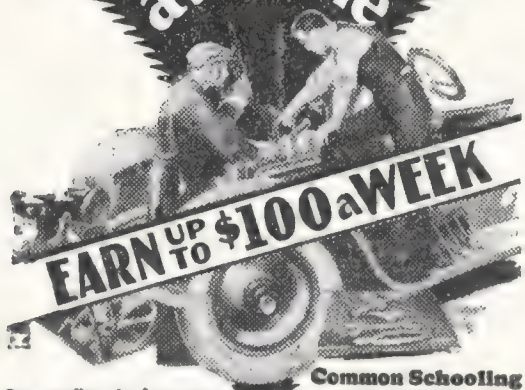
Let us send you free samples of Edgeworth so that you may put it to the pipe test. If you like the samples, you'll like Edgeworth wherever and whenever you buy it, for it never changes in quality.

Write your name and address to Larus & Brother Company, 26 S. 21st Street, Richmond, Va.

Edgeworth is sold in various sizes to suit the needs and means of all purchasers. Both Edgeworth Plug Slice and Edgeworth Ready-Rubbed are packed in small, pocket-size packages, in handsome humidors holding a pound, and also in several handy in-between sizes.

[*On your Radio—tune in on WRVA, Richmond, Va. —the Edgeworth Station. Wave length 254.1 meters. Frequency 1180 kilocycles.*]

New, Easy Way to LEARN AUTOS at Home



EARN UP TO $100 a WEEK

Say goodbye to low pay. Get into the Auto Business, where big pay—extra money—raises come quick! A brilliant future awaits you in the World's Biggest Business!

Clip Coupon!

Send coupon for Free Auto Book! See how I train you right at home, in every branch of auto work. Learn how I prepare you quickly and easily, for the Big Jobs paying up to $100 a week—and more.

Open Auto Shop

My Free Book tells how men make extra money while training, and then go into business with no further capital. It's the training that counts, and it is complete training that I give you.

4 Working Outfits

I train you the new, easy and practical "Job-Way". I give you actual Auto Jobs to do, and I give you the tools and equipment, too!

Common Schooling All You Need

Men between 16 and 55 with very little education are becoming Garage Owners, Superintendents, Foremen. Whether you have had years of Auto experience, or never touched a car before, send for this Free Book, now. I'll show you the quick way to get in line for real success in the Auto Business!

Get the Facts!

Learn about my Employment Service—Consultation Service. See how I help you get the good Jobs. Send for this remarkable Free Book. Clip coupon now!

4 Testing and Repair Outfits Included

B. W. COOKE
Directing Engineer
Chicago Motor Training Corp.
1916 Sunnyside Ave., Chicago
Dept. 13-86

MAIL THIS FOR FREE BOOK

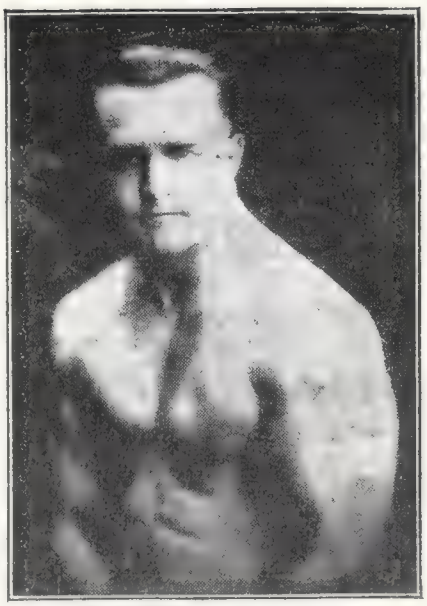
B. W. COOKE
Directing Engineer
Chicago Motor Training Corp.
1916 Sunnyside Ave.,
Dept. 13-86, Chicago, Illinois

Send at once your FREE Book "Auto Facts". Also full particulars of "Job-Way" Training. No obligation on my part whatever.

Name.....

Address..... *Age*.....

Town..... *State*..... *Occupation*.....



EARLE LIEDERMAN--The Muscle Builder

Author of "Muscle Building," "Science of Wrestling," "Secrets of Strength," "Here's Health," Etc.

Muscles 5¢ apiece!

Wouldn't it be great if we could buy muscles by the bag—take them home and paste them on our shoulders? Then our rich friends with money to buy them, sure would be socking us all over the lots.

But they don't come that easy, fellows. If you want muscle, you have to work for it. That's the reason why the lazy fellow never can hope to be strong. So if you're lazy and don't want to work—you had better quit right here. This talk was never meant for you.

I Want Live Ones

I've been making big men out of little ones for over fifteen years. I've made pretty near as many strong men as Heinz has made pickles. My system never fails. That's why I guarantee my works to do the trick. That's why they gave me the name of "The Muscle Builder." I have the surest bet that you ever heard of.

What I'm Going to Do

In just 30 days I'm going to increase your arm one full inch. Yes and add two inches to your chest in the same length of time. But that's nothing. I've only started; get this—I'm going to put knobs of muscle on your shoulders like baseballs. I'm going to deepen your chest so that you will double your lung capacity. Each breath you take will flood every crevice of your pulmonary cavity with oxygen. This will load your blood with red corpuscles, shooting life and vitality throughout your entire system. I'm going to give you arms and legs like pillars. I'm going to work on every inner muscle as well, toning up your liver, your heart, etc. You'll have a snap to your step and a flash to your eye. You'll feel the real pep shooting up and down your old backbone. You'll stretch out your big brawny arms and crave for a chance to crush everything before you. You'll just bubble over with vim and animation.

Sounds pretty good, what? You can bet your old ukulele it's good, It's wonderful. And don't forget, fellow--I'm not just promising all this--I guarantee it. Well let's get busy, I want some action--So do you.

Send for My New Book

"Muscular Development"—It's Free

Take it and read it. It's the peppiest piece of literature you ever flashed your eyes on. And 48 full-page photos of myself and some of my numerous prize-winning pupils. This is the finest collection of strong men ever assembled into one book--Look them over--Doctors, lawyers, merchants, mechanics, and every line of trade you can think of. I swear you'll never let this book get out of your hands again. And just think--you're getting it for nothing. Grab it.

Take your pen or pencil and fill out the coupon--But **do it now** before you turn this page.

EARLE LIEDERMAN, Dept. 1709, 305 Broadway, New York City

EARLE LIEDERMAN,
Dept. 1709, 305 Broadway, New York City

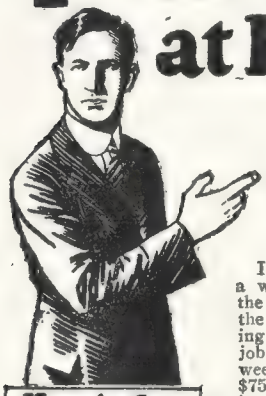
Dear Sir:—Please send me absolutely **FREE** and without any obligation on my part whatever, a copy of your latest book, "Muscular Development." (Please write or print plainly.)

Name .....

Street .....

City .....State .....

I Will Train You at Home to Fill a Big-Pay Radio Job



If you are earning a penny less than $50 a week, send for my book of information on the opportunities in Radio. It's FREE. Clip the coupon NOW. A flood of gold is pouring into Radio creating hundreds of big pay jobs. Why go along at $25, $30 or $45 a week when the good jobs in Radio pay $50, $75 and up to $250 a week? "Rich Rewards in Radio" gives full information on these big jobs and explains how you can quickly learn Radio through my easy, practical home-study training.

Salaries of $50 to $250 a Week Not Unusual

The amazing growth of Radio has astounded the world. In a few short years three hundred thousand jobs have been created. And the biggest growth is still to come. That's why salaries of $50 to $250 a week are not unusual. Radio simply hasn't got nearly the number of thoroughly trained men it needs.

You Can Learn Quickly and Easily in Spare Time

Hundreds of N. R. I. trained men are today making big money—holding down big jobs—in the Radio field. You, too, should get into Radio. You can stay home, hold your job, and learn in your spare time. Lack of high school education or Radio experience are no drawbacks.

Many Earn $15, $20, $30 Weekly On the Side While Learning

I teach you to begin making money shortly after you enroll. My new practical method makes this possible. I give you SIX BIG OUTFITS of Radio parts and teach you to build practically every type of receiving set known. M. E. Sullivan, 412 73rd St., Brooklyn, N. Y. writes: "I made $720 while studying." G. W. Page, 1807 21st Ave., S., Nashville, Tenn., "I picked up $935 in my spare time while studying."

Your Money Back If Not Satisfied

My course fits you for all lines—manufacturing, selling, servicing sets, in business for yourself, operating on board ship or in a broadcasting station—and many others. I back up my training with a signed agreement to refund every penny of your money if, after completion, you are not satisfied with the lessons and instructions I give you.

Act NOW—64-Page Book is FREE

Send for this big book of Radio information. It has put hundreds of fellows on the road to bigger pay and success. Get it. See what Radio offers you, and how my Employment Department helps you get into Radio after you graduate. Clip or tear out the coupon and mail it RIGHT NOW.

J. E. Smith, President, Dept. 9-F
National Radio Institute
Washington, D. C.

RADIO NEEDS TRAINED MEN!

Here's the PROOF

$375 One Month In Spare Time

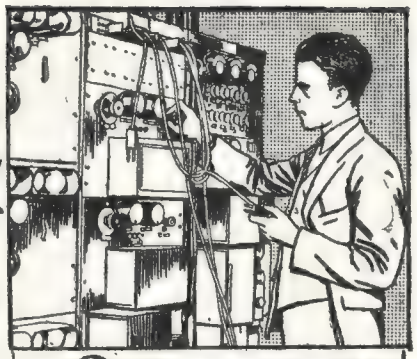
"Recently I made $375 in one month in my spare time installing, servicing, selling, Radio Sets."

Earle Cummings, 18 Webster St., Haverhill, Mass.

$450 a Month

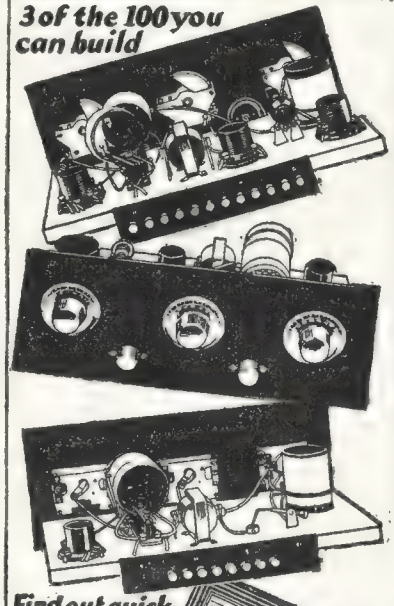
"I work in what I believe to be the largest and best-equipped Radio shop in the Southwest and also operate KGFI. I am averaging $450 a month."

Frank M Jones 922 Guadalupe St., San Angelo, Tex.



You can build 100 circuits with the six big outfits of Radio parts I give you

3 of the 100 you can build



Find out quick about this practical way to big pay

Mail This FREE COUPON Today

J. E. SMITH, President,
Dept. 9F, National Radio Institute,
Washington, D. C.

Dear Mr. Smith: Send me your Free book "Rich Rewards in Radio," giving information on the big-money opportunities in Radio and your practical method of teaching with six Radio Outfits. I understand this places me under no obligation.

Name .....Age .....

Address .....

City .....State .....

Employment Service to all Graduates

Originators of Radio Home Study Training

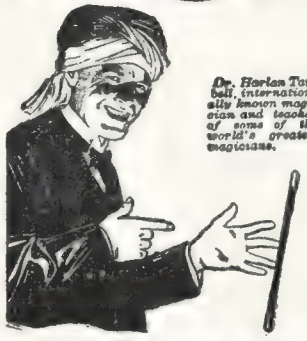
if-

you pledge

yourself to secrecy we will teach you the secrets of

Real Professional

Magic



Dr. Harlan Tarbell, internationally known magician and teacher of some of the world's greatest magicians.

Be a Magician!

Earn $750 to $1000 a Month

For the first time in the history of Magic the age-old, sacredly guarded secrets of Mystic Art are being revealed. Now at last you can learn to be a Real Professional Magician. Yes, and you can learn this wonderful art *easily and quickly* AT HOME. You are taught the mysterious *Principles* by which the Professional Magician works. But before you can study, you must sign the Magician's Solemn Pledge of Secrecy. This means you are getting the *guarded secrets* of the Magic Profession.

WRITE! Mail coupon now for big free Magic Book telling all about the great Tarbell Course in Magic. ***Get Our Low Prices and Easy Payment Plan.***

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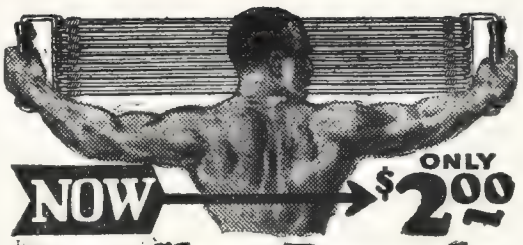
1920 Sunnyside Avenue, Chicago, Ill.

Gentlemen: Without any obligation send me your free literature and information all about your wonderful "Tarbell Course in Magic." Also tell me about your Low Price Offer and Easy Payment Plan.

Name .....

Address .....

..... *Age* .....



Giant Chest Expander

and Progressive Exerciser

Be a muscular Marvel. Have the muscles of a superman. Become strong for your health's sake or to astound your friends with extraordinary feats which only men of giant strength can do.

Free Instructions on progressive exercising.

The Giant Chest Expander and Progressive Exerciser is made with new, live springy rubber so as to give it long wear and great resisting qualities. Sold with a guarantee of 50 rubber bands to each cable and to give entire satisfaction or money back. Made four ways—

$2 FOR 5 CABLES
$4 FOR 10 CABLES
$6 FOR 15 CABLES
$8 FOR 20 CABLES

Use This Money Saving Coupon

SEND NO MONEY!

Send at once and get your Giant Exerciser at the present low introductory price. Deal with a long established, reliable firm. Use coupon now.

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5009 Kingdon Bldg., B'way & Duane St., N. Y.

Please send your [ ] cable [ ] Progressive Exerciser
(Indicate the Exerciser you want.) It is understood that I will pay postman price plus few cents postage on arrival and if I am not satisfied with this Exerciser, I will return it within 5 days and get my money back.

Name .....
Street .....
City ..... *State* .....

I'll Pay You $30 a Day!

Show my Rain Proof FITS-U Caps to Men

I'll pay you $30 a day to show my marvelous line of rain-proof Fits-U Caps. With my liberal commission of $1.00 on every sale it's a cinch to clean up $5.00 or more an hour in spare time. "In two hours," writes one successful salesman, "I made $15.70." It's the rain-proof and made-to-measure features that gets orders. By a secret process, every Fits-U Cap is made absolutely rain-proof! Price $2.65—$1.00 for you! EVERY CAP MADE TO INDIVIDUAL MEASURE! Two other fast-selling numbers; pretty women's hat "Lovette" and cap, tie and muffler combination.

Write for **FREE** *Outfit*

DON'T WAIT, ACT NOW

I'll send elaborate selling outfit to you FREE. Get started immediately. Just send name and address. Postal will do.

FITS-U CAP COMPANY
Dept. B-175 CINCINNATI, OHIO

"Perfume Creation of Movieland"

TRIPLE EXTRACT

LOVE DROPS

A new creation, an enchanting powerful aroma. Rich and poor; old and young, surrender to its charm. $2.50 size for $1.00, postpaid, or $1.27 C. O. D. with instructions for use. Also Secrets of Loves Psychology and the art of winning the one you love with the original 7 Psychological and successful plans for captivating and holding the love of the one you love.

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STORY IDEAS WANTED

for photoplays, magazines. Big demand. Accepted any form for revision, development, copyright and submission to markets. Established 1917. Free booklet gives full particulars.

UNIVERSAL SCENARIO COMPANY
408 WESTERN AND SANTA MONICA BLDG., HOLLYWOOD, CALIF.

I Pay Men $40 A DAY!

S. W. Allen of California made $40.80 in one day's "Joyful work"! Hundreds of other men are reporting amazing incomes—many of them doubling and tripling their former salaries.

Just wear this FREE CAP

Just wear this beautiful hand-tailored FREE RAINPROOF Cap. When your friends see it, nine out of ten will want one like it. They can't resist the Rain-Proof idea—it's so new and unique. You can make a splendid income in full or spare time. "I haven't found a man who doesn't fall for the made-to-measure idea," writes Chas. Horstman. Fit guaranteed. Choice of 20 beautiful fabrics. Latest styles. Far superior to store caps.

Amazing Rainproof Test Convinces All

All you do is spill water on the cap. Men gasp with amazement when they see the water roll off the surface without wetting it. Secret process makes fabric absolutely rainproof. Wear Taylor Cap in rainstorms—keeps perfectly dry, retains its smart new appearance. Positively the sensation of America.

SEND NO MONEY Start At Once

I want an agent in your community to wear this free cap and take orders. No experience needed. No investment, no deposit. Complete outfit waiting for you. Sell direct from maker to wearer at low factory cost and collect big commission in advance on every order. Big Income waiting for you. Spare or full time. Send name and address at once for the most startling money-making opportunity of your life.

MAIL COUPON FOR FREE OUTFIT

J. W. TAYLOR President **TAYLOR CAP MFRS.** Dept. 10-J Cincinnati, Ohio

FREE CAP OUTFIT

J. W. Taylor, Pres.
Taylor Cap Mfrs.
Dept. 10-J.
Cincinnati, Ohio.

Rush FREE Taylor Cap Outfit and details of your amazing Rain-Proof Cap offer.

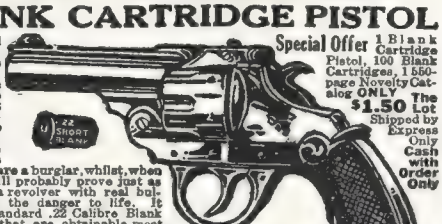
Name .....

Address .....

City .....State .....

BLANK CARTRIDGE PISTOL

This well made and effective pistol is modelled on the pattern of the latest type of Revolver, the appearance of which alone is enough to scare a burglar, whilst, when loaded, it will probably prove just as effective as a revolver with real bullets without the danger to life. It takes the standard .22 Calibre Blank Cartridges, that are obtainable most everywhere. **Special cash with order offer:** 1 superior quality Blank Cartridge Pistol. 100 Blank Cartridges, and our new 550-page DeLuxe Catalog of latest novelties all for **ONLY $1.50**. Shipped by express only. Cannot go by parcel post. Extra Blank Cartridges 50c per 100. Remember it is quite harmless, as it will not accommodate loaded cartridges. Special Holster (Cowboy Type) for pistol 50c. No C. O. D. Shipments.



Special Offer 1 Blank Cartridge Pistol, 100 Blank Cartridges, 1 550-page Novelty Catalog **ONLY $1.50** The Lot Shipped by Express Only Cash with Order Only

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We start you in business and help you succeed

New plan. No experience or capital needed. We furnish everything. Spare or full time. You can easily make

$50-$100 weekly Write at once

Madison Organization 562 Broadway, New York

AGENTS! Sell Shirts

Make Big Money Without Investment

Many salesmen making Big Profits each week selling Bostonian nationally known high-grade, broadcloth shirts. 3 for $6.95

Wonderful Selling Outfit FREE

POSTAGE PAID. $1.50 cash commission for you. $9.00 value. Quick sales. Write today for free sample outfit

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CORRECT your NOSE

to perfect shape while you sleep. Anita Nose Adjuster guarantees SAFE, rapid, permanent results. Age doesn't matter. Painless. 60,000 doctors, users praise it. Gold medal winner. Booklet. Free. Write for it today.

30 Day FREE TRIAL

ANITA INSTITUTE, 942 Anita Building, Newark, N.J.

MILES are just minutes of happiness when you're riding a Harley-Davidson. The surge of power under finger-tip control —rush of tonic air in your face— thrilling getaway that sweeps you around and beyond parades of cars —there's nothing like motorcycling!

Join the Jolly Riders! A Harley-Davidson is easy to buy—and costs almost nothing to run. In after-work hours, weekends and vacations you'll find it the best pal you ever had.

The 1929 models are out — with double headlights and many other dandy new features. Ask your dealer about them — and about his Pay-As-You-Ride Plan.

Mail the Coupon for our latest catalog.

The Single— famous "80 miles per gallon" solo mount, priced at only $235 complete, f. o. b. factory.

HARLEY-DAVIDSON MOTOR COMPANY
Dept. NSG., Milwaukee, Wis.

All models have front and rear brakes, and complete electric equipment. Twins from $290 up, f.o.b.

HARLEY-DAVIDSON MOTOR CO.,
Dept. NSG., Milwaukee, Wis.

Interested in ☐ Twin ☐ Single.
Send catalog and complete details.

Name.....

Street.....

City.....State.....

Free to Asthma and Hay Fever Sufferers

Free Trial of Method That Anyone Can Use Without Discomfort or Loss of Time

We have a method for the control of Asthma, and we want you to try it at our expense. No matter whether your case is of long standing or recent development, whether it is present as Chronic Asthma or Hay Fever, you should send for a free Trial of our method. No matter in what climate you live, no matter what your age or occupation, if you are troubled with Asthma or Hay Fever, our method should relieve you promptly.

We especially want to send it to those apparently hopeless cases, where all forms of inhalers, douches, opium preparations, fumes, "patent smokes," etc., have failed. We want to show everyone at our expense, that our method is designed to end all difficult breathing, all wheezing, and all those terrible paroxysms.

This free offer is too important to neglect a single day. Write now and begin the method at once. Send no money. Simply mail coupon below. Do it Today.

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1907F—Frontier Bldg., 462 Niagara St., Buffalo, N.Y.
Send free trial of your method to:

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$50 to $125 Weekly

Paid Auto Experts—

Complete course of training in a few weeks. Satisfaction or money back. Write for big auto book FREE and remarkable low tuition offer, including FREE Railroad fare.

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McSWEENY Auto and Tractor Schools
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Government Positions

Clerk Carriers, Rural Carriers, Railway Mail Clerks, Postmasters, Department Clerks, and many others. Splendid salaries, easy work, vacation with pay. Only common school education required. Examinations often. Thousands appointed each year. Send for our Civil Service Catalog No. 7.

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BEST SHIRTS AT LOWEST PRICES

AGENTS WANTED
to represent old established firm, and take orders. Make $10.00 to $25.00 daily. Big complete line direct to wearer. Dress Shirts, Work Shirts, Flannel Shirts, Underwear, Pajamas, Overalls, Coveralls, Pants, Sweaters, Riding Breeches, Leather Coats, Lumberjacks, and Playsuits. Everything guaranteed. Experience unnecessary! **BIG OUTFIT FREE!** Write quick!
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If I Send You a Suit

made to your measure from your choice of finest fabrics in latest style, will you wear it, show it to your friends and let them see my beautiful patterns and classy new styles? Besides giving free suit, I'll pay you $3.00 an hour to introduce my tailoring. Write at once for my startling new special offer.
L. E. ASHER, President Dept. 906
Peoria and Adams Streets, Chicago

BE MY AGENT

MAKE $100 A WEEK!

FREE HUDSON COACH

RIGHT now I need 700 men and women in every part of America to handle my dealings with my customers. If you are ambitious to make $100 a week in full time, $50 for spare time—if you act quick, I will show you how to get into an established business in your locality.

No Experience—No Cash Needed

Without experience, special training or cash investment, you can make $125 in a week like Christopher Vaughn; $47 in a day like Henry Albers; $18 to $20 a day like Mrs. B. L. Hodges; $210 the first two weeks like Edgar Morris. I give you my personal help and tell you exactly what to do to make big money.

I Furnish Everything

I supply all the equipment you need to make $100 a week. Write for full details. Don't send me any money—simply your name and address. I will tell you everything, send you all the facts without cost or obligation. In addition to big cash profits, I have arranged to supply my agents with Hudson Coach Autos FREE.

Write for details of this amazing offer—TODAY.

Albert Mills, Pres.

AMERICAN PRODUCTS CO.

606 Monmouth Ave., Cincinnati, Ohio

Work for Me!

$26 PAY EVERY DAY!

J. C. Allen of New York made $150.00 in one week working for me. He's only one of hundreds who earn Big Steady Incomes. You can double your income too.

Just Wear and Show FREE SHOES Wear Stylish, handsome shoes I furnish FREE. Show them to friends and neighbors. All men and women want shoes like them. Exclusive patented arch-support is joy to tired feet and gives wearer youthful pep. Smartest styles, genuine leathers, lowest prices—plus amazing exclusive features—make 4 out of 5 order from you. Big income, full or spare time. Experience not necessary. Write for FREE SELLING EQUIPMENT.

RODGER WILSON, Style Arch Shoes, Dept. Y-3, Cincinnati, O.

FRENCH LOVE DROPS

An enchanting exotic perfume of irresistible charm, clinging for hours like lovers loath to part. Just a tiny drop is enough. Full size bottle $1.20 prepaid or $1.39 C. O. D. plus postage. Secrets free.

D'ORO CO.

Box 90, Varick Station, New York
Dept. NSG9

LUCK

Money, Happiness, Wealth, Success in Love. Business and Games are confined in this LUCKY UNIQUE RING. Get Your Share! 14K Gold S. mounted with one carat Reproduction Diamond. SEND NO MONEY! On arrival pay postman ONLY $2.40. Send strip paper for ring size. Satisfaction Guaranteed.

EAGLE NOVELTY CO.

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High School Course in Two Years!

You Want to Earn Big Money!

And you will not be satisfied unless you earn steady promotion. But are you prepared for the job ahead of you? Do you measure up to the standard that insures success? For a more responsible position a fairly good education is necessary. To write a sensible business letter, to prepare estimates, to figure cost and to compute interest, you must have a certain amount of preparation. All this you must be able to do before you will earn promotion.

Many business houses hire no men whose general knowledge is not equal to a high school course. Why? Because big business refuses to burden itself with men who are barred from promotion by the lack of elementary education.

Can You Qualify for a Better Position

We have a plan whereby you can. We can give you a complete but simplified high school course in two years, giving you all the essentials that form the foundation of practical business. It will prepare you to hold your own where competition is keen and exacting. Do not doubt your ability, but make up your mind to it and you will soon have the requirements that will bring you success and big money. YOU CAN DO IT.

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Our 21 Jewel Santa Fe Special Guaranteed for Life.

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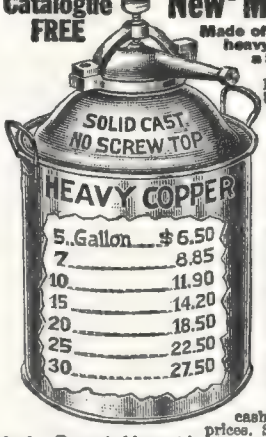

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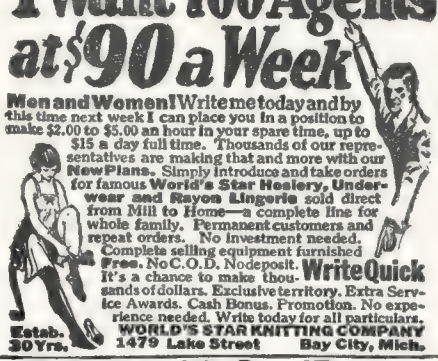

Men and Women! Write me today and by this time next week I can place you in a position to make $2.00 to $5.00 an hour in your spare time, up to $15 a day full time. Thousands of our representatives are making that and more with our **New Plans.** Simply introduce and take orders for famous **World's Star Hosiery, Underwear and Rayon Lingerie** sold direct from Mill to Home—a complete line for whole family. Permanent customers and repeat orders. No investment needed. Complete selling equipment furnished **Free.** No C.O.D. No deposit. **Write Quick** It's a chance to make thousands of dollars. Exclusive territory. Extra Service Awards. Cash Bonus. Promotion. No experience needed. Write today for all particulars.

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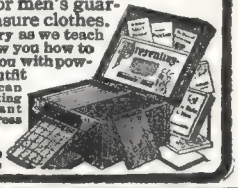

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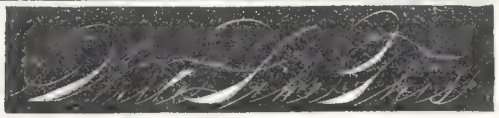

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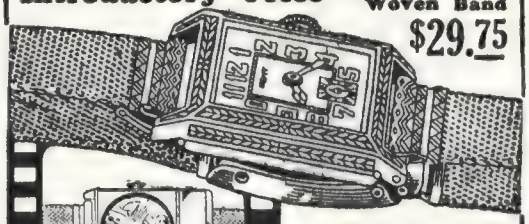
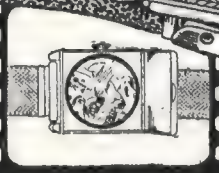
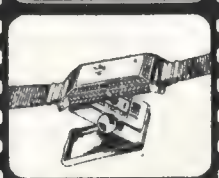
Upon arrival of your letter we will open a Ten Month Charge Account and send the Kent watch so that you can wear it for 15 days. If satisfied, pay $2.87 a month—otherwise return and your dollar will be refunded.
None sold to persons under 20 years of age.

Introductory Price—Complete with Woven Band
$29.75







The Kent is a specially constructed watch that is dust-proof and jar-proof. With each purchase you receive an insurance policy which is your protection. Here are the features of its construction illustrated to the left:

1—A flexible dust-proof shield covers the movement which keeps out dust and dirt.

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3—Case is specially constructed of three pieces with bezel beautifully engraved. This protects the movement from dust and dampness.

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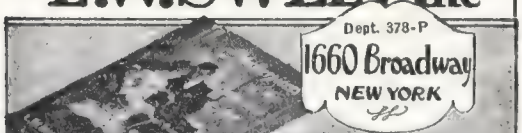
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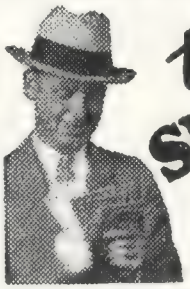

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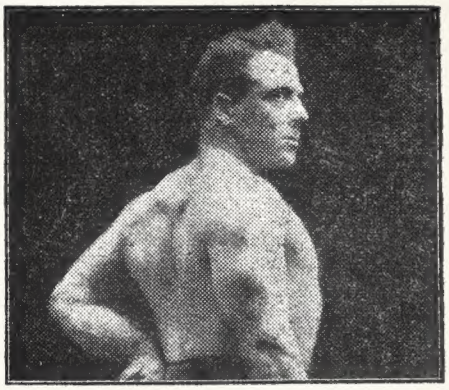

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